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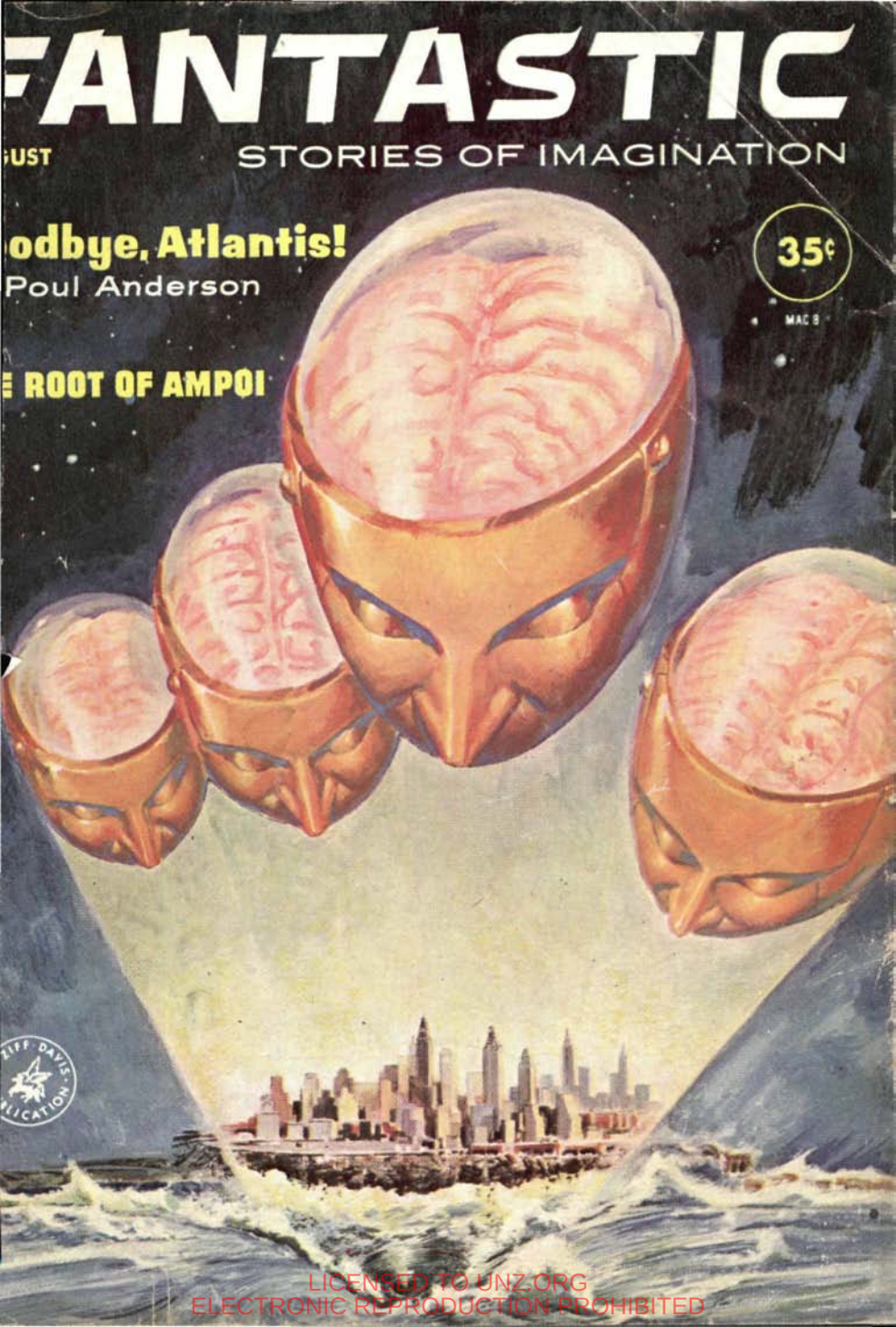

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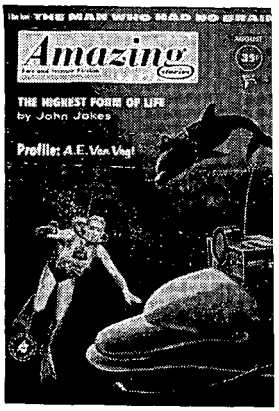

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FANTASTIC
STORIES OF IMAGINATION

AUGUST 1961
Volume 10 Number 8

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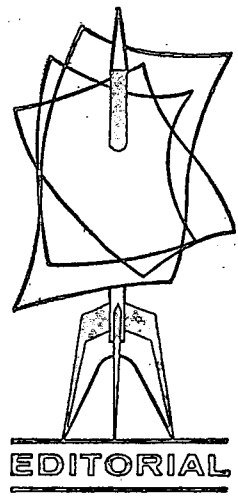

FOR our money, one of the great stories of imaginative fiction was Arthur C. Clarke's *"The Ten Billion Names of God."* For the one or two of you who might never have caught up with it, it tells of the Tibetan lamasery which buys an electronic computer to run through the list of the names of God—for to find all His names is the purpose of existence. The American technicians laugh behind their tapes at this kookie philosophy. But then, as the computer reaches the end of its run, the technicians look upward into the clear Tibetan night sky, and see the stars going out.

It is sad to report that fact has—to a small degree—once again trod hard on the footsteps of fiction. For an electronic computer at Yale University is now busily humming its way through thousands of punched cards analyzing the religious beliefs in magic, ghosts, demons, love philtres, and other occult accessories of Thailand.

PROF. Robert B. Textor is an anthropologist who spent six years in Thailand studying the religious culture of the country. He did it from the inside out, too; shaving his head, wearing the yellow robes of a Buddhist monk, and living in a small rice-country village. According to a newspaper account, Textor found 114 objects the Thais believed had magical powers. To each of these objects he assigned 145 "attributes"—classifying them as material or non-material, singular or plural, male or female, white magic or black magic, capable of being commanded or prayed to, etc.

The end product was 20,000 combinations which found their way into the little slots and slits on the IBM cards. And now Prof. Textor will run them through his computer and come up with the answers. Whether they will prove anything more than the questions themselves prove is a moot point. All we can say is that if Prof. Textor finds the Thais have been wasting their time with those love philtres, not a single saffron-robed monk will be safe from suspicion again. If he finds that love philtres are for real—well, we have already taken the liberty of putting in a conditional order for a few drops. Not for us, of course. For Cele!—NL.

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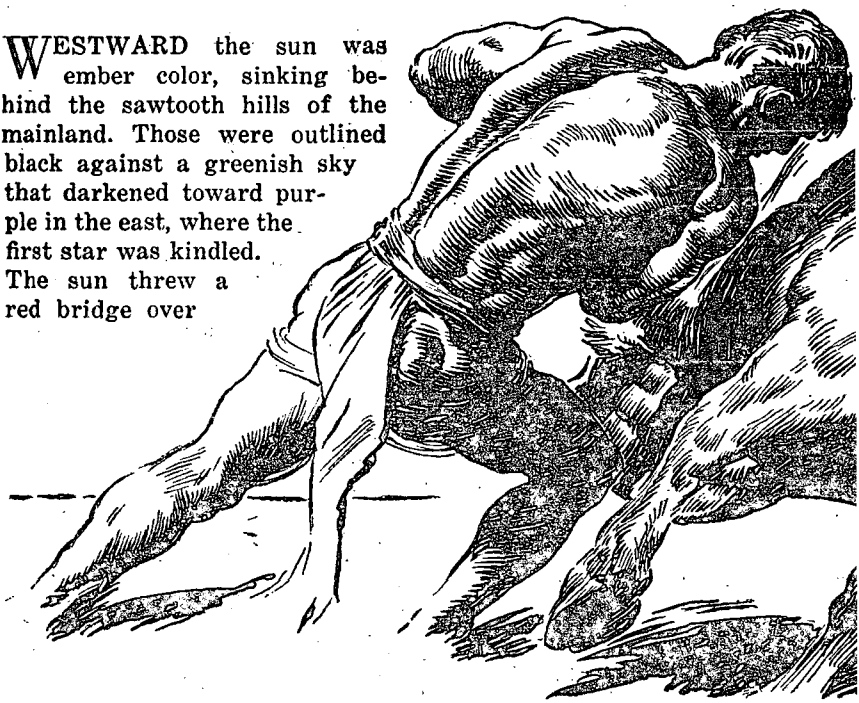
GOODBYE, ATLANTIS!

By POUL ANDERSON

Illustrator FINLAY

In the crystal tower of the Holy the ancient rituals were done. And then, They came: four naked brains housed in heads of bronze. And whether they were Gods or Demons, Owan would never really know.



WESTWARD the sun was ember color, sinking behind the sawtooth hills of the mainland. Those were outlined black against a greenish sky that darkened toward purple in the east, where the first star was kindled. The sun threw a red bridge over

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the narrows, turned the open ocean northward and southward into molten brass, and splashed on the towers of Usant.

Standing in the roof garden of Falconhome, Owan felt the wind. It blew most softly, rustling the leaves and blossoms around him, but it was cold. He draped the blue cloak on his left shoulder about the guardsman's cuirass, stamped his feet, and wished that his knees were not left bare between kilt and boots. When he leaned over the parapet he could hear somewhat of the city traffic, wheels, engines, shrunken at this fifty-story height to a whisper. Lamps were being lit down there, between stiff tower walls. The glow fell on horsemen, carriages, ox-drawn wagons, people afoot, and a new steam-powered train which came puffing like a toy along the tracks laid in Kraken Street. Higher up, where the last crimson sunlight could still touch them, windows blazed.

The ax hung at his belt rattled against a marble lion whose mane was living ivy. He kissed the javelin in his hand to show that he meant no disrespect to Shridnu, Whose emblem is a lion. Owan came of plain sailor folk, and though he had served a few years in the royal guard he remained devout. In appearance he was tall, blunt-faced, blue-eyed; the hair beneath his winged helmet was reddish brown.

A footfall on the graveled path fetched his mind back to earth. He turned. The heart sprang in him when he saw Rianna.

"Good eventide, my lady," he said, bending the knee.

She nodded. "Good eventide to you, Captain. I came to tell you that we shall eat soon; but first my husband invites you to drink wine with him."

Why did she not send a servant? His pulse thudded. *Did she want an excuse to see me alone?*

Then she went to the parapet, breathed deeply, and said with a small sad laugh, "After an hour supervising that dolt of a cook, I had to have some fresh air. He cannot get through his head that Donwirel likes a chop lightly sautéed, not fried to leather."

He regarded her—graceful in her white robe, with tawny hair flowing past a face as cleanly shaped as the face on Lady Maruna's image in Her temple—and he thought drably, *If this wife of another man were not so full of love for him, would she be as fair as she is?—Yes. More so.*

"A pleasant evening," he fumbled.

"Cold," she replied. "The sun looks misshapen, as if a devil had stepped on it. And the ships of Wir are still on patrol."

HIS gaze followed her uneven gesture. The flare on the sea was too brilliant for him to spy

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many of the besieging fleet. But some hulls and masts were visible, black and lean. He knew how many others ringed this island. A few more such weeks, and not even the nobles in their penthouses would have sautéed lamb chops. Already the poor were trapping mice to eke out their rations.

"How long will they wait, Owan?" Rianna asked, low-voiced.

"Until Usant admits that Wir is the rightful king," he shrugged.

"Yes, yes; I know; and that will not be till we are dead." Pride drove the hurt from her tones. Her uncle was the old king, whom the rebels had slain; her father was now regent; her infant nephew had been crowned in Windspear Tower, after Usant's shore batteries had sunk enough ships to prove to Wir that he could never make a landing while those gunners lived.

"Of course they will blockade us as long as they can," Rianna continued. "But how long will that be?"

"I dare not talk about that." Involuntarily Owan glanced at a building near the middle of the island, gray and steep-sided, its roof domed in clear quartz that flung back the sunset like a beacon: the tower called Holy.

Rianna laid a hand on his. Even through his gauntlet, he felt her touch, more strongly than fire or sharp steel. "Donwirel has grown so haggard," she whispered. "Often at night I feel him jerk in his sleep, as if a devil stabbed him. He cannot tell me anything . . . oh, yes, I know he's sworn to secrecy, and I would never ask him to break an oath . . . but he is so rigid about it. You know him, Owan. After a year as his guard, you know how stern his honor is. He will not give me so much as a hint whether Govandon's work is going well or badly. And that—not knowing—not daring to bear his child, because it might starve in the siege—that gnaws me. And he knows it does—and it hurts him that I am hurt—and that hurts me again!"

Owan looked into the desperate green eyes and blurted, "I shouldn't tell you this much myself. But . . . it's going well. Govandon Archpriest lacks very little to complete his work."

"Oh," she said faintly, and leaned on him for a while that he wished were much longer. When at length she raised her face to him, he saw radiance.

"If ever one soul helped another, Owan," she said, half laughing and half gulping, "you have just aided me. Will we really be free again? I can't thank you enough—"

He stared at the sea, hoping she would not read his expression. But she did, and he felt

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some of the joy leave her. "You don't seem overly glad about this," she remarked uncertainly.

He bit his lip. "Well, my lady, let's just say I'm prejudiced about the means that Govandon plans to use."

"But he is the Archpriest!"

"I know, I know. He's explained to me, with texts and fine reasoning, that it'll be lawful. But my father was an old-fashioned man."

"Then you should be all the happier to help keep alive the old-fashioned ways. Surely Wir, with his antheap philosophy, is more than a rebellious pretender. Anything is lawful to stop him."

"No argument, my lady. After all, I joined up as soon as the fighting began. Even during the retreat from Lanlen, when our bare feet tracked blood in the snow, and his damned talking birds flew past and promised us food and clothes if we'd desert, and every morning more men had disappeared . . . I never quit." Owan realized he was bragging. "Excuse me, my lady, I'd better go join your husband. Set your mind at ease about Govandon. I'm sure everything will be all right."

He went from her with unnecessarily long strides.

THE penthouse was smaller than most, but tasteful, in the portico-and-cupola Isteth style. As he entered the reception room, Owan kissed his javelin to the ivory image of Vedan. Candles burned clear and unwavering before the niche; even in miniature, the grave bearded face and the muscular arm upholding the eagle gave an impression of size. *Father, forgive us,* Owan thought, for his forebodings about Govandon's work were still heavy in him.

His fisher kin might have hoped for some token of response, perhaps a flicker in the light making the chiseled countenance look approving or angry. But Owan had learned from the noblefolk that the images were not the gods. The gods, Vedan, Shridnu, Kalivashtu, and the Lady Maruna, dwelt on some remote plane of existence, incomprehensibly above man's universe. To guard us They had had Their natural laws and principles of righteousness. Chants, incense, prayers, good works did not reach Them, nor draw Them down to us; rather, we were raised infinitesimally nearer to them.

Unless—

Owan discovered that his jaws were clenched so tightly they ached. He hastened on to the refreshment room.

That was small and circular, with exquisite peacock mosaics. Modern gas lamps illuminated it and a fire crackled cheerily on

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the hearth. Donwirel, husband of Rianna, hereditary Marchmaster of Isteth (where now Wir's overseers drove the peasants with lash and pike off their ancestral farms and into huge communal ranches), special assistant to Govandon Archpriest—Donwirel, thin and handsome in a loose golden-scaled tunic, sat at the table. He drank from a carved elephant tusk. A goblet of smoky glass stood across from him. Closer at hand was a carafe whose contents glowed like ruby.

"Ah, good eventide, Captain," he smiled. "Be seated. Have some wine."

"My lord is most kind," Owan said unsurely. He always ate with Donwirel and Rianna—his task of guarding the nobleman required it—but he had never yet been asked to share a draught. On duty he had worn loneliness like a helmet; off duty, he repaired to the waterfront, where common soldiers and sailors were more easeful company and where he could sometimes forget how sunlight touched Rianna's hair.

"I feel celebratory," Donwirel said. "In a few days, luck willing, this whole wretched business comes to an end."

Despite his own knowledge, Owan must push down terror. It was one thing to comfort Rianna, another to meet the reality. "Is my lord indeed so sure?" His voice sounded odd in his ears. "When last Govandon Archpriest spoke in my presence, he said there were certain doubts remaining in his mind."

Donwirel's dark eyes fastened keenly on the guardsman. "What manner of doubts?" he inquired.

"About . . . how to summon the gods. The only sure way to bring Them is one he'd rather not use. He hopes to find some other means, equally safe. . . . More than that I didn't hear."

Still Donwirel studied him. "I thought you a bold man, Owan."

"I like a good fight as well as anyone, my lord. But this—I'm a simple man. I don't pretend to understand magic. And, well, naturally a person's always fretted most by what he doesn't understand."

"Sit down," Donwirel urged. "Fill your goblet. Be at ease."

"I gather we won't be needed tonight at the Holy?"

"No. Govandon works alone, burrowing through the archives. No one else is alive today who can read some of those texts. Prophets like Yevan and Nifedd are thousands of years in their graves. Language changes; the prophetic utterances are distorted in successive translations, finally are altogether lost. Govandon seeks to reconstruct what those ancients actually discovered about the gods. No, we can't help him at this stage."

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"I never helped at all," Owan said. He placed himself on the edge of a chair. In some vague part of his mind he noticed with surprise that he was elaborately denying having had any part in Govandon's work. "I was only there to guard you against enemy agents, my lord."

"And make sure I don't serve Wir's cause myself." In his neatly clipped beard, Donwirel's teeth flashed white.

"My lord!" exclaimed Owan, shocked. "No one ever believed you could be a spy."

"Of course not, or I wouldn't have been asked to help Govandon," Donwirel said. "However, you know as well as I do that Wir's philosophy has been in existence for many years and has many adherents. Not all of those adherents have openly declared themselves, even now when Wir has the whole mainland. Anyone here on Usant could be an enemy agent, biding his time. It's sensible to decree that every man assisting Govandon be accompanied by a guard of assured loyalty, everywhere he goes." He laughed. "I've enjoyed your company, anyhow, tongue-tied though you are most times. Come, drink up there! You haven't even poured your wine."

OWAN obeyed. The liquid gurgled from the carafe, loud in the silence. Even so had blood gurgled from that bull whose throat Donwirel cut in a certain crypt, after Owan had wrestled the huge bellowing animal down onto the stones. . . .

He shuddered to recall what rustlings and whisperings had been heard when the bull died and the torches went out. The men had departed, sealing the door with a signet from the tomb of a forgotten king; but next morning only the bull's bones were found.

Other things had been done in the Holy which Owan did also not care to dwell on. Mostly, of course, he had yawned, or played tossgave with his fellow guardsmen, while the learned ones pondered ancient books and threshed out long syllogisms. He had never imagined it would be so difficult to understand the gods. "They ask nothing of you but your duty to other men, and a bit of kindliness," his father had said. "If you want to put garlands on Their images as well, that's up to you; They won't mind." But Govandon created a homunculus which died when it first saw the sun but yelled certain things in its fever that the Archpriest needed to know.

Owan was glad that Donwirel's part in the work had been, for the most part, clean. The Marchmaster helped study the old volumes, performed strenuous ritual dances, practiced asceticisms

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in the hope of revelation, observed patterns in the stars—It would not have been well for one who had burned a white panther in a wicker cage to come home and kiss Rianna.

"What's wrong?" Donwirel asked. "You look like a death's head."

Owan stared at his wine. His eyes weren't quite focused. "I was just thinking, my lord, how glad I'll be when this is indeed finished."

"We had many ugly tasks," Donwirel agreed. "But how could we help it? For more than a thousand years, ever since the Bright Prophet, men have not invoked the gods directly. What used to be known about such procedures is long buried. In fact, the knowledge was suppressed. We've had nothing to go on but hints, traditions, legends, fragmentary manuscripts at the bottom of the archives. We've had to grope our way."

"Yes, yes, my lord—"

"And in fumbling along, naturally we repeated many mistakes of our ancestors. We had to try everything, no matter how barbaric. And worship *was* barbaric prior to the Bright Prophet. Blood sacrifice, often human; drugged sybils, self-tortured anchorites, temple slaves; orgy, delirium, and fear. That's what the Bright Prophet spoke out against: and rightly so. But in all the horror of those days, there was a kernel of truth. It's a historical fact that some kings and archpriests did have the direct help of the gods. At least, they had powers we can't duplicate today. And they themselves said the gods appeared to them."

"If they didn't mistake devils for gods!"

The words seemed to come of themselves from Owan. He put down his half lifted goblet, appalled. But Donwirel nodded calmly.

"Yes, Captain, that idea has been discussed too. It's contrary to orthodox belief, I know. Everyone's been taught, for instance, that Cuedd the Glorious got the personal help of Kalivashtu when the heathen were at his gates. But sometimes when you saw us scholars whisper with Govandon, you guardsmen, we were considering the possibility that it was actually a devil which Cuedd had raised. Because it really doesn't quite make sense that all-merciful Kalivashtu, the Lifegiver, would destroy men with fire. Does it?"

Owan kissed his javelin. Donwirel sipped and continued: "I may as well tell you, since we're under the same oath, that that's why we delay. Since he does not like to use the one sure, safe method of calling the gods which we discovered, Govandon has developed an alternative procedure.

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But he has to make certain beforehand of Who, or what, that ritual will bring."

"If the summoned one does turn out to be a devil—"

"Well, we're not above using such assistance; but it demands special precautions. A devil would turn on us after it had fulfilled our command and was free again: unless, that is, we had prepared the right magical shield. A god, though, answering our prayer, would be another case entirely."

"I don't know—I mean, naturally! Of course!"

"You still look worried. Come, tell me, what's wrong?"

Owan sighed. "I was just wondering, my lord. What is the answer? I mean, suppose it really was the gods Who did all those cruel things in the old days. Then how can They be wise and just and merciful?"

"That is quite a problem," Donwirel admitted. "Govandon's answer is as follows. Our ancestors were on a lower plane of spiritual evolution. They would not have understood the austere concept of divinity we now have. So the gods must perforce manifest Themselves in ways that men could grasp. In this manner, men were slowly led upward from savagery. At last they had evolved so far that the revelations given the Bright Prophet could be comprehended by ordinary people. Then the gods departed for Their own plane of existence. Man was now able to take care of himself."

"Um-m-m . . . well . . . what about the savages across the ocean? Have the gods abandoned them?"

"No. Someday we will establish colonies there and teach those poor woodsrunners what the Bright Prophet taught us. We are the chosen instrument of the gods, you see."

"An instrument which Wir would break," Owan murmured. "Yes, now I understand. And that's what gives us the right to call the gods back to earth. It's not just us in danger, it's the whole future of man."

"No doubt," said Donwirel dryly. "But don't be so serious, my friend. Drink. To your health!"

He raised the elephant's tusk. Owan clinked his goblet against it and poured the wine down his throat in the lusty fisherman style.

THE taste was unexpected. For a minute Owan hesitated, moving his tongue against his teeth. What did that slight bitterness remind him of—? The smile vanished from Donwirel's features. Very still the Marchmaster sat. The tigers on his ivory horn seemed to have more life than he did. Owan noticed

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that Donwirel had drunk little.

His ears buzzed. He shook his head, trying to clear away a mist. The noise grew louder, became a sound like surf, like an incoming tidal wave. Suddenly the room spun. Owan tried to cry out, but it was a croak in his gullet. Somehow he got to his feet. A peacock shimmered in the wall. He took one step. His knees buckled. He went to the floor.

Dimly through darkness and roaring he heard Donwirel whistle. A rear door opened. From the study beyond there came a man who was tall and yellowhaired. He wore a green tunic which he was already unbuttoning. Donwirel stooped over Owan and began to strip the guardsman's armor. Owan screamed at his body to move. No sound came forth. His arms flopped limply as Donwirel turned him on his face.

Night closed down. When it lifted again, Owan heard—in the booming and buzzing and distortion—"Yes, his stuff fits me well, my lord. You gauged our sizes right close."

"Good. Let me see . . . here, be careful. Your helmet has got to cover your hair entirely or someone will be sure to notice you aren't him. Otherwise you look enough alike. The sentries won't pay close attention; after so many months, you're just part of my outfit. But remember, if we meet anyone high-born, don't bow. Bend the knee. You're supposed to be a commoner."

A toe nudged Owan. "What'd you give him, lord?"

"A pinch of bledwin powder in the bottom of his goblet. I thought he'd never drink. Very well, let's be on our way. The sooner we get those papers and get off this damned island, the happier I'll be."

The tide rose again, drowning their footfalls. Owan clawed at consciousness, but it slipped from him. Once he thought, far off, that drowning must feel like this, toward the end, when your lungs were full of the sea. . . .

HE was being shaken. A gull mewed, shrill and hungry. The tide had rolled his corpse onto a beach, he lay awash, the gull came down as the surf receded. Wings whistled overhead. The gull landed heavily on his chest. Its beak struck into his throat. His lids flew open and the sun stabbed his blind eyeballs. He strangled on sea water.

"Again, Owan. Again!"

Vomiting racked him. He thought he was going to tear his belly muscles loose from his bones. Long after his stomach was empty he continued to retch and shiver in the serving woman's arms.

"There, there," she muttered. "There, there, master. You're all right now. Right away I saw you

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lying there and smelled the smell I did in that broken goblet, I knew you'd drunk from the bledwin flower. Nor long ago, for a finger down your mouth has brought you back. Be easy, mistress. He's come to no harm. We arrived soon enough."

"Owan!" He forgot his headache when he saw Rianna. She knelt beside him, seized both his shoulders and shook him. Her hair streamed over his breast. "Owan, what happened? What's wrong? Where's Donwirel?"

He groaned to a sitting position. The maid went out. Rianna brought herself under control and stroked his forehead until the other woman returned with a basin of water and some towels.

"First we'll swab you, master," she said matter-of-factly, "and then you'd best wrap this other one around your shoulders, or you'll catch cold lying there with naught but a loincloth. You're no fit sight for my lady, that's certain."

"I'll take care of him, Arva," said Rianna. "Go make some tea."

"But, mistress—"

"Shall the blood royal not serve its own servants? Go, I told you."

The maid gulped and obeyed. Rianna washed the foulness off Owan, murmuring to him. By the time she finished, he was able to totter erect. Irrationally, he looked first for the green tunic. The man in the study had worn a green tunic, which he must have discarded when he donned Owan's uniform. How could anyone address earth's most beautiful lady, wearing only a towel?

He found the garment and slipped it on. Rianna guided him to a chair. "Can you speak now?" she asked. "Don't let me hasten you. I'm sure Donwirel is unharmed. I saw him leave. He had another man with him who I thought was you. They didn't notice me—I had just come back inside—and Donwirel looked so grim that I dared not call to them. You know how he is when he's preoccupied. When they were gone, I came back here, thinking he might have left a note telling me whether to wait supper. Instead, I found you on the floor. I cried for Arva and she revived you. For that she shall have a hundred golden ewals." Rianna's laugh was shaky. "Cheap at the price!"

Her breathless explanation helped steady Owan; and merely looking at her, where she sat flushed beside him with both hands enclosing one of his, was like a renewal of blood. Still a trifle giddy, he laughed likewise. She started at the harsh cackle. "What's the matter, Owan?"

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HE stared at the darkness in the window. "His plan was so good. Everything was thought of beforehand. But when the moment came . . . for action . . . he forgot to tell you to wait supper. On that rock he wrecked his ship."

"What do you mean?"

Mirth faded. He gazed so hard at her that she let him go and shrank back a little. He must gather all his courage to tell her.

Finally: "Best you hear this from me, here and now, my lady, and not from some stranger. Donwirel drugged me himself. He had an accomplice hidden in his study, dressed him in my uniform, and went off to the Holy."

She got so pale that he seized her in his turn. Her arms felt cold against his palms. "Oh, no," she choked. "You're wrong. Maruna would not let it be."

Owan's strength was returning in great strides, but he felt no joy of it. "Donwirel is a spy for Wir," he said. Each word must be dragged forth. "Now that Govandon's work is complete, Donwirel means to steal it and escape in a boat to the enemy."

"But—No," she begged him. The ghastliest part was that she did not weep, though her mouth was stretched out of shape with pain. "There must be a mistake. Donwirel . . . no, I've been Donwirel's wife for . . . a year—"

"He was Marchmaster of Isteth for ten years before that," Owan said. "A long ways from the capital. He could have been corrupted in his youth and no one hereabouts would be any the wiser."

Because his father had told him that gods and men must do what is right or become beasts and devils, Owan stood up. "I'd best go to the Holy at once," he said. "If I'm mistaken, we'll get the proof there, and nobody will be happier than me."

And a part of him distressed his father by denying this: by remembering that a guardsman who uncovered a dangerous spy might well get a patent of nobility and thus aspire to the hand of a Marchmaster's widow. He said resolutely, "I'll tell you as soon as I know," and started to leave.

"Wait for me!" she cried.

"My lady . . . you can't—"

"My grandfather was a king. Will you deny me, Captain?"

He stood bemused until he recollected that time was important. "Come, then," he said, and hurried out the door.

THE elevator engine seemed to chuff for a thousand years at the bottom of the shaft, before the cage came in answer to Owan's oathful command down the speaking tube. The operator bent his knee to Rianna and gaped at her escort. "I thought you was

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with my lord half an hour ago," he said.

"Get this thing *down!*" Owan snarled.

By the time he reached the carriage level, the drug had so far worn off that he understood how urgent the case was. He brushed by his lady and ran down the ramp to the stables. A groom gave him a stupid look. "Saddle two fast ones," Owan snapped. "And where can I find a weapon?"

"Uh? A weapon? Why, uh—"

Owan shook the man till the teeth rattled in his head. "Something to fight with, by the gods!" Glaring around the antechamber, he saw a pitchfork stuck in a bale of straw. "That'll have to do. Get those brutes saddled!"

A shove sent the groom stumbling into the main room. From its darkness came a sweet mingled pungency, horses, hay, manure, feed, leather. One animal blew out its lips with a gentle noise, and Owan remembered how soft that muzzle was, and how the body in gallop would ripple between his thighs, hoofs would ring and the wind roar across sun-dazzled grassland miles—Why had the gods departed from a world so beautiful?

Rianna entered. She was still very white, her eyes looked washed out and she bore herself with unnatural stiffness. But she said bleakly, "Perhaps he did betray his king. It looks as if he did. Then kill him for me, Owan."

He had no reply. They waited in common misery until the groom led out two gray geldings. He helped her mount and led the way up the ramp. Horseshoes clopped loudly, answered by hollow echoes. The thought flickered in him that he probably typefied some absurd philosophic principle: riding with a headache and another man's wife to stave off a half-imagined catastrophe with a pitchfork.

BEYOND the carriage gate of Falconhome, Golden Way lay broad and nearly empty. Its harbor blockaded, Usant had little business to transact other than survival. After dark most folk sat in their apartments, few shops kept open, and only every third street lamp was lit, to save gas. Thus the avenue became a river of darkness, banked by sheer walls in whose upper heights windows glowed like the eyes of animals come down to drink. Stars were visible overhead, distance-dwindled and impersonal, upon a strip of deep-blue night. At intervals a cobra lamp post could be seen, the lantern in its jaws casting a wan glow on the bronze coils.

But time was short! Owan spurred his horse to full speed. The hoofbeats made a drumroll

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which the blind arcades flung back. Night air flapped his tunic and sheathed him in chill. Occasionally he glimpsed other humans: a mounted watchman whose helmet wings gleamed in the murk, a robed burgher whose belly had begun to shrink, a pauper in rags who stared from an alley and mumbled that Wir at least fed the people. And behind him rode Rianna. But he had never felt so alone.

He burst onto the Sacred Way. Granite sphinxes, couching in gloom, seemed to bare fangs at him as he passed. Now ahead in its open plaza rose the Holy. Its walls cascaded down from the dome like a frozen fountain. On each side there was a god statue, fifty feet tall. Father Vedan guarded the east, gazing across the ocean to the savage lands beyond; the eagle on His wrist threw a monstrous shadow of wings. Shridnu, strong plumed warrior, bestrode His lion and looked north toward the glacial cap of the world. Youthful Kalivashtu tossed His long hair and laughed westward, hands holding up the cobra which gave His blessing to the mainland. But it was Maruna, Our Lady of the South Wind, Maiden and Mother, beneath Whose image Owan came galloping.

He didn't stop to bend his knee as he should. *You will understand,* he told her. *O heal the hurt in my love who rides behind me!*

He reined in below the great staircase, sprang to the pavement and pelted upward. The entrance yawned black as the mouth of a devil. It dwarfed the two guardsmen who slanted their pikes across Owan's path. "Halt!" cried one.

He panted to a stop. "Let me by. Give the alarm. There are spies inside."

"What d'you say?" The man trod close and peered, a burly redbearded fellow whom Owan didn't recognize. The light from the eternal flame at Maruna's feet was dim up here.

"What d' you mean?" he asked. "Who are you, anyway?"

"Gods curse you," Owan yelled, "if you don't strike that gong I will!"

"No, you don't." The sentry caught Owan's wrist. The other man's pike lifted, aimed at the ribs. "You don't make a move, friend, till we've got the chief here."

Rianna arrived. "Let me by, you fools!" she demanded.

"Huh? Who're you?" asked the red guardsman.

"What? Why . . . I am—" She stared in astonishment. But she did look wild, Owan realized, with her robe disarrayed and her hair in elflocks.

"Whoever you are, stay put till I fetch the chief," said the red-

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beard. "Where is he, Conar?"

"Hm, I don't know for certain. Might be making the rounds, or might be down in the orderly room, or could even have ducked over to Madam Pwill's for a quick one. You'll just have to hunt for him."

IT WAS like a nightmare in which you fled from a monster but your feet were turned to lead. Owan struggled to awaken. *I will wake! These rule-bound yokels can't be real. . . . But Rianna said Donwirel's treason couldn't be.*

Convulsive as a tortured sleeper, he brought up the butt of his pitchfork. The redbeard was cuirassed, but stood with legs braced wide apart. Owan clubbed him from beneath. His shriek echoed off the buildings across the plaza. As he collapsed, Owan twisted the fork and levered him in front of the other man's weapon. The pikehead grated on armor.

Owan stepped under the wielder's guard. His fist smashed into the face beneath the winged helmet. The sentry lurched backward. Owan hit him again, felt anguish lance through his hand, and knew remotely that he had broken a knuckle. No matter. The guardsman was sinking dazed to his knees.

Owan unshipped the battle ax of the redbeard, who was still horribly half conscious. Momentarily he wondered if any good could come from such a night's work as this. He straightened. "Strike that gong, Rianna," he said. "Wait here and explain when the reinforcements arrive. I'm going ahead. I think I know where they'll be."

He sped into the entryroom. By day this vaulted chamber was always astir with folk going into the sanctuary beyond for a moment of prayer or coming out with peace in their eyes. On festival days the entire ground floor of the Holy was crowded with colorful garments, flowers and music and exaltation. But tonight the room was a cave, scarcely lit by the candles before the god images. The mural of Shridnu triumphing over the storm devils was glimpsed as a malignant writhing; Maruna's girl caryatids leered from shadow. Owan ran.

An acolyte dozed at the elevators. He blinked to wakefulness when Owan snapped, "Ninety-ninth. Quick!"

"What? But . . . who . . . you can't—"

Owan brandished the ax. "I certainly can. Get moving!"

The acolyte wailed and scuttled into the cage. Owan stood behind him, hoping there would be no need to kill. The boy threw the Up lever, cogs engaged the endless cable, floor after floor

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creaked by. The Level of Dwelling, the Level of Learning, the Level of Contemplation, the Level of Mysteries . . . Owan lost count. But on the ninety-ninth story Govandon had assembled the results of his work.

The cage jarred to a halt. "Very well, get down again," Owan said and leaped out. Already the gongs were booming, from floor to floor, and he thought he heard a distant shout of guardsmen.

HIS bare feet thudded down a malachite corridor, coldly gas-lit. At the end, he saw a door swing open. Donwirel came out. The nobleman bore a thick bundle in his arms, the papers of Govandon. (And no copies had yet been made, Owan recalled.) As he saw who came plunging toward him, Donwirel's eyes widened. "Get him, Tregwen!" he barked. "Fast!"

They might still escape in the confusion. If they got time. Owan poised, barring the corridor. The man who resembled him came out, ax aloft.

There wasn't a chance to be afraid. As Tregwen hewed at his head, Owan parried the blow. The force jolted his muscles. He sidestepped and his ax slithered past the other helve, to his enemy's wrist. But that was protected by a gauntlet. Tregwen grunted and tried to catch Owan's haft with his free hand. Owan knocked that arm aside. He struck home. The blow clanged harmlessly on the cuirass. Tregwen jumped back.

For a moment they stood crouched, measuring each other. Thoughts ran like lightning in Owan: *He'll feint at my left shoulder, then chop for my legs, expecting his armor to protect his head.* It was a standard maneuver against an opponent without mail. Tregwen lunged. Owan ignored the feint and leaped straight in the air. The enemy ax whirred under his feet. Off balance, Tregwen spun half around. Owan saw the neck exposed and smote as he landed.

Tregwen had instantly hunched his shoulders. Owan's ax crashed on the helmet. A wing was lopped off and Tregwen staggered. But he remained alive. He brought his ax upward and blocked a second blow. Again they disengaged.

OWAN circled about. Tregwen turned with him, but heavily. He was shaken by the buffet on his helmet. Owan cursed himself for not making the obvious thigh cut when he had the chance, even though it wouldn't have ended the fight. He pounced, making a feint of his own at the face. Tregwen's haft blurred with the speed of parry. Owan's slash swerved in midair

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and glanced downward. The brass strips hanging around the kilt were parted and the ax bit in the hip.

Tregwen grunted and cut at Owan's left leg. Owan blocked with his free wrist. Ungauntleted, he knew sickening pain when the helve smote. But he managed a short chop into the right arm of his enemy. Tregwen reeled back. His blood dripped bright on the floor. Owan pressed the advantage, striking and striking. Most of his blows were stopped, but some hit and some of those encountered flesh. There were few counterblows. Iron boomed and banged in the corridor. Breath came loud and harsh. The alarm gongs bellowed from below. Step by step. Tregwen was driven back.

When the last wall halted him, he struck wildly. Owan met that attack with the twisting defense that can pull a weapon from a man's hand. Tregwen's ax clattered across the marble. He stared stupidly before him. Owan struck at the neck. There was a meaty sound and Tregwen went on his face. Blood rivered from him.

..But I didn't need to kill him. I wasn't thinking. Gods Who created mercy, forgive me.

Donwirel!

Owan spun about with a gasp. The corridor was empty.

He must have taken the stairs. Somehow Owan carried his feet to that door and down a spiral that clattered under his haste. The well was dim, rare lamps touched walls more dusty and faded than was right in this building, and the air was stale. Once, when he passed a window, Owan saw an owl flap from its nest.

O gods, if Donwirel has escaped after all!

Several floors further down, he met a squad coming up. "Halt!" they said. A crossbow trigger snicked. Wearily he dropped his wet ax and accompanied them.

LATER, as his daze lifted, he found himself being pushed into a room draped all in red. A black throne faced a niche where stood an image of Vedan in His stern aspect of Justice. Twenty watchmen posed rigid, axes in hand: not royal guards posted to this duty, like most of the temple sentries, but warrior priests, whose helmets covered their faces and had crests shaped like eagle's talons. One grasped Owan's arm, another held Donwirel—whose lips bent into a sardonic smile at his erstwhile escort—and a third waited beside Rianna. Blackrobed and whitebearded, the Archpriest Govandon sat on the throne.

Only his eyes moved as Owan was brought in. "Close the door," he said. It shut with a massive

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slowness that bespoke soundproofing. The crimson drapes seemed to writhe before Owan like smoke. "Captain, the lady Rianna has told a tale which the Marchwarden denies. Now do you tell your story."

Owan looked at Rianna. Her own gaze never left Donwirel, and she trembled as she stood. Her husband appeared at ease, arms folded, continuing to smile as he regarded Govandon. The words came out of Owan as if a stranger said them.

There followed a silence.

After some fraction of eternity, an armed priest entered and related what he had found on the ninety-ninth floor. "And the dead man's armor, Lord Archpriest, was etched with the name of Owan, Glindir's son of Cardeu."

"It does not form part of your story, Marchwarden that was, that your guardsman lent anyone else his armor," Govandon states. No expression touched his features.

Donwirel raised his tousled head. "My lord," he said with pride, "until trial before my peers, with the regent as judge, has established guilt, I remain what I am. Pray address me accordingly."

The Archpriest's words fell like stones. "You are in the Holy, and crimes have been done here. The law gives me judgment."

Something went out of Donwirel. He wet his lips and looked toward Rianna. "My darling," he breathed. "You were the one who denounced me. But you can't have meant it. You were befooled. You don't want me to die. Go to Windspear. Get help—"

She clenched her fists so hard that the nails drew blood, but otherwise she did not move.

"I could bind you over to the regent for trial," said Govandon, "but what could he do save punish you? The gods never sought revenge."

ANOTHER while he sat, hardly seeming to breathe. Owan glanced back at Rianna and saw that she was watching him—him, Owan!—as if he were the last life in her world. His heart jumped.

Govandon said:

"You shall expiate your crime, Donwirel from Isteth. Do you remember why we have not yet called the gods?"

The prisoner's mouth opened and closed, but no sound came forth. His fear could be smelled across the room. When the silence grew unendurable, Owan ventured, "Is it not, my lord, that you're afraid you may raise demons instead?"

The old eyes gauged him for a space. Finally, "Yes," Govandon replied. "However, there is one way of summoning the gods and

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only the gods. I have delayed, hoping to find another method equally certain. But now the need for that is gone. The means which seemed the most cruel has become the one most merciful."

Donwirel strangled on a moan.

"Yes," Govandon nodded. "You know."

Rianna nearly screamed, "What will you do?"

"You must do it, my lady." For the first time, pity touched the Archpriest's slow voice. "Harder service was never asked of the blood royal. Yet remember, this is his expiation and cleansing."

She snatched Donwirel's hand. It lay limp in her grasp. The prisoner was breathing quickly and loudly.

"As you must have gathered, my lady, our effort in this past year has been to rediscover those rites by which the ancients could call the gods to their aid," Govandon told her. "We have found only one rite which is unfailing. This we know of from unequivocal texts going back no further than the Bright Prophet's time. He put an end to all blood sacrifice. Yet even he distinguished between two sorts. There was the slaying of an animal, a helpless captive, or a criminal whom men were glad to be rid of. That was a demonic act, and those who answered its summons were more apt to be devils than gods.

"But there was another immolation, when a human being was slain by one who loved him. And that act would bring the holy ones Themselves, in Their infinite compassion, and They would grant the prayer which was so just and urgent that it overcame love.

"My lady, do you still love Donwirel?"

She threw her arms around the prisoner and shrieked, "No!" He embraced her and glared above her head at Govandon.

The Archpriest waited till her weeping neared an end, and then he said with enormous gentleness:

"I know the royal blood too well, Rianna. You could not live with a traitor, nor poison the heritage of your fathers with his. Secular punishment is meaningless and degrading. Can you not see, sacrifice is the one release you can give him, and give yourself?"

"The devils take myself," she shuddered, and strained closer against Donwirel. "No!"

Govandon's face congealed. "Then I must bind him over to the regent. The penalty for treason is savage. He may curse you before they let him die."

SHE turned her blurred eyes to the Archpriest, from end to end of the room like a caught animal, and finally back to Don-

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wirel. Sweat poured down the prisoner's cheeks. "Take me away," he rattled. "Take me to Windspear. Rianna, you can plead for me. The regent is your own father. He won't—won't—"

She released him, took a step away, and halted. Owan started to go to her. A guard stopped him.

Slowly, her back straightened. She shook the hair off her brow. No more tears flowed. When she spoke, the words came toneless but altogether steady. "As you wish, Lord Archpriest. You are right."

"Well spoken, my lady," the old man said.

"Only . . . let it be done now. I do not think I would be able to do it tomorrow."

Silence fell anew. The steel-masked warriors tautened where they stood. Owan felt sickness in his belly. *Can this indeed be the way?* someone gibed. *How can death, any death, summon the gods from Their universe of universes? How can we bid Them destroy Wir's men, who are living human creatures?*

Then Govandon struck the throne with his fist and cried: "Why not? All else is prepared. The rituals have been rehearsed many and many a time. Why should the gods not come to deliver us this very night?"

Donwirel made a choking noise and sagged into the guard's arms.

THEY had bathed and robed Owan and brought him to stand beneath the dome of the Holy, feeling that he had earned the right to see the advent. But for the gods he cared nothing. There was an ashenness in him. He was here only that Rianna might have one friend to take her home.

The floor gleamed blacker than the night sky, inlaid with jeweled symbols of wisdom, love, and mystery. The air was thick with incense. Owan's weary head spun. He scarcely followed the chanting of the hundred-man choir, it came to him like a noise heard in dreams, and Govandon's prayers at the altar had the humming quality of fever. Dim was the mass of the priests, save where gold and steel glistened, and more remote than the stars were the lit windows in other towers where folk carried on their unsuspecting lives. At each quarter of the dome, silhouetted against night, was a statue: Eagle's wings and beak, rampant Lion, hooded Cobra, and the Rose. Starlight fell through the crystal, arrow sharp.

They had let Rianna, veiled and voiceless, stand beside Owan. Her fingers were cold in his. Never before had he understood what a weight to bear was royalty.

And yet, said the devil in him, royalty, like priesthood, must not only be dutiful. It must be wise.

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But when a tyrant's ships prowled about the last fortress of the king, what was wise?

A trumpet sounded, one icy note that clove the chanting, and they led forth Donwirel. He stumbled as if blind. They laid him across the altar. Rianna went from Owan on the second trumpet call. She knelt while Govandon cried the final prayer, the ancient and clangorous prayer which Cuedd had uttered against the heathen. Rising like a machine, she took the knife he gave her. It was black and invisible from where Owan stood. She stooped in the light of the few candles and kissed her husband farewell. He lay passive, already forsaken by his own will. A third trumpet rang. Rianna lifted the knife and brought it down.

Blood ran over the altar, which housed the bones of the Bright Prophet.

Her face alone did not lift toward the sky.

THERE was no sound at first. Those Who came outran sound. But when the wind of Their passage struck, the noise roared louder than bursting mountains. The Holy and all the towers of Usant swayed. Windows smashed and glass flew in daggers. The crystal dome held, but suddenly its surface was crazed, so that the stars could not be seen.

Those who had come were still discernible. Not Vedan with the awesome face of justice, nor Shidnu the evilsmiter, nor laughing Kalivashtu, nor Maruna. Lurid as suns in heaven there glowed four naked brains.

Heads of bronze housed them, rigid scornful faces and blind eyeballs. But the skulls were open to the brains, which pulsed and burned, larger than moons, lightning playing over each wrinkle; and out of the bodiless flying heads there poured a yellow radiance. From horizon to horizon that light shone, viciously brilliant, so that Owan thought in his staggering mind he could count the houses on the mainland shore and the waves on the waters. Then the thunder of advent struck the sea and turned it wild, and houses began bursting into flame.

Owan did not know what unlocked his muscles. He left the screaming crowd and ran across the floor, toward the altar, shielding his eyes from the light but never taking them off huddled Rianna. Close by, he could hear Govandon call out, where the Archpriest stood by the corpse on the altar with electric sparks crawling in his beard: "Their aspect—the aspect of vengeance—surely They need not reveal Themselves in human form—see, see, Their force has lifted Wir's ships into the air, oh, see how

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the ships are dropped and burst asunder! The wrath of the gods is raised against our foeman!"

Owan hauled Rianna to her feet. His clumsy haste tore the veil from her. She stared numbly at him. "Get up! This way!" he said through the tumult.

"The gods, the gods have come," she wailed.

"I don't give a curse! No good can come of what was done tonight. I'm getting you out of here!"

He picked her up and ran toward the door. Most of the priests were on their faces, adoring the brains. One guard, shocked at Owan's blasphemous flight, cut at him with an ax. Owan kicked, caught the helve in midswing, tore it loose, and booted the man aside.

In the anteroom he found one elevator shaft empty. The cables were snapped and the cage had fallen. He stumbled into another, dumped Rianna on the floor and yanked the Down lever. As they descended, the cage swayed and bounced, struck the shaft wall, tilted, shivered, and echoed with the groans of the building.

Rianna seized Owan by the shoulder. "Are you gone insane?" she yelled. "The gods are here, Wir's fleet is destroyed, and you run from Them! Take me back!"

He said harshly, "I don't think the gods should endanger innocent folk too," and shook her off. When they were on ground level, he must drag her by force out into the street.

But there she screamed.

THE sneering heads hung low above the Holy. Even as Owan watched, the dome shattered. Crystal poured earthward, an avalanche of shining knives, mingled with broken things that had been men. The walls cracked open.

Then she fled with him, along streets that heaved and split underfoot. Once a tower collapsed behind them and bricks whizzed and bounded past. The racket filled their world as did the unmerciful yellow blaze. They passed other people, a few who stumbled lunatic with horror, more who lay beneath fallen pillars or broken statues. But there were not many. Most had been trapped in their upper-level homes.

A horse galloped mad through the street. "What can we do?" Rianna sobbed. "Where can we go?" The ground shuddered and she stumbled into his arms.

"The waterfront," he clipped. "Now that the enemy ships are gone, the sea will be safer than the land."

A tower was lifted bodily. They saw it fly through incandescent heaven, breaking in pieces that rained on the city.

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Somehow they reached the docks. The smoke of burning ships and warehouses made the air dense and acrid. Nonetheless Owan spent time investigating each boat he found. He needed one big enough to cross the ocean but not too big for him and her to sail. There should be dried food and fishing tackle in the lockers and a cistern to catch the rain water he could expect at this season. Eventually, with the pier splintering beneath him, he came upon one such. With Rianna's help he cast loose and hoisted the mainsail. A hot wind raged through the narrows. He ran before it to the island's end, put the tiller over and beat eastward into open sea.

Only then did he dare look back. The heads had abandoned Usant for a time and gone over to the mainland. As far as he could see, the kingdom seethed with flame. But even as he watched, the fires were quenched, for the land was slowly sinking into the ocean. He reflected grimly that the surge would give him a good strong boost on his own course.

THE noise was now so distant that he could hear Rianna. "Owan, Owan, they were mistaken. Govandon, the priests, everyone was wrong."

"Indeed they were," he said through tightened lips.

"Those were not gods they summoned. They raised devils instead. Devils that feed on destruction . . . that had not been called or fed for a thousand years . . . whose hunger was grown so great that they devoured everything, everything—" She lay down in the hull and wept.

That was well, Owan thought; for thus she did not see the heads return to Usant, pick up the entire island and drop it in Morwen Deep.

That raised such waves he was kept blessedly busy for a space. When at last the boat was safe and he could look again, the burning brains were gone. There was an enormous quiet. Darkness lay on the sea, save for the tiny stars. He steered toward the sunrise that was still many hours away.

Presently Rianna crept to him and sat at his feet. He caressed her hair. She caught his hand and clung. "We raised the hungry devils," she whispered. "Owan, Owan, can the gods ever forgive us?"

"*We* didn't know," he said practically. "You and I. The fault is scarcely our own. Perhaps no one's." He paused. "But our land and our people are drowned all the same. I think . . . when we reach the other shore . . . we can teach the wild folk somewhat . . . . in memory of our land."

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"Teach them what was done this night?" she shivered.

"No, surely not. Rather teach what the Bright Prophet did. The destroyers are sated now. They've gone home. And . . . since they only came when summoned . . . I don't think they are able to come unless called. They were so hungry after a thousand years of waiting—maybe in ten thousand years they'd starve to death. We'll do what we can."

She didn't answer in words, but she kissed his hand.

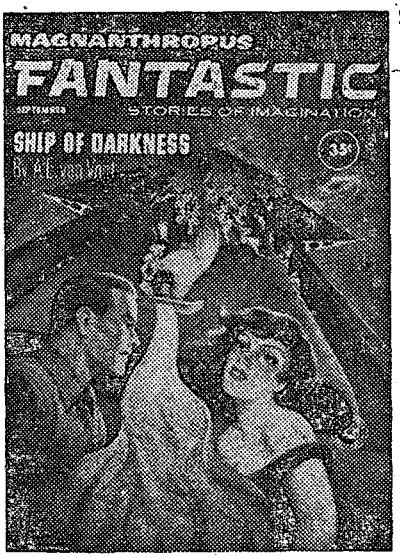
He grasped the tiller with his other hand and looked bleakly past sail and bowsprit to the eastern edge of the world. *Let her never be told,* he thought. *Let her believe that Govandon blundered and raised devils. I can spare her this much: the fact that the Bright Prophet was a fool and that I, preaching his words to the savages, will be a charlatan.*

For I do not see how there could have been a mistake. I believe that we did bring to earth the veritable gods, Vedan, Shridnu, Kalivashtu, and Maruna, They Who for Their own purposes made the universe.

THE END

COMING NEXT MONTH

A novel of scope, sweep and superscience-fantasy headlines the September issue of FANTASTIC.



Magnanthropus, by **Manly Banister,** tells the story of the rebirth of a new man out of the depths of an unimaginable cataclysm. It is filled with action, many fascinating characters, and original thinking.

The Classic Reprint featured in the issue is one of the great stories of all-time: **A. E. van Vogt's** *Ship of Darkness,* the blood-chilling tale of a space-pilot who is wrecked on the deck of an impossible craft sailing through space with a mysterious crew.

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The ROOT of AMPOI

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

Introduction by Sam Moskowitz

SINCE the death of H. P. Lovecraft, the opinion has been frequently expressed that Clark Ashton Smith is the greatest living master of a particular brand of science fantasy. His first reputation was made as a poet and upon the publication of his first volume of verse at the age of 19, The Star Treader, *issued in 1912, he was hailed as an important new talent on the American scene. He was past 35 when he turned his hand to fiction, enthralling the readers of* WEIRD TALES *with fantasies written in a style of sheer poetry. His greatest impact was achieved when he began using interplanetary and extra-dimensional background for his tales. Like Lovecraft, he could wring far more horror from a rational scientific setting than from the supernatural. His story* The Vaults of Yoh-Vombis *is a logically developed science fiction story which takes place on Mars, but for gruesomeness it is matched by few stories in the English language. Because he had a greater understanding of the human psyche than Lovecraft, Smith's horrors were infinitely more terrible. Because of this same superior characteristic, he imbued his other science fiction tales with qualities of pathos rarely found in Lovecraft's work.* The City of the Singing Flame, Visitors From Mlok *and* Masters of the Asteroid *occupy a niche entirely their own.*

If any one factor retarded the wider popularity of Smith's efforts, it was his undisciplined use of one of the most fabulous vocabularies yet evidenced on the printed page. Appreciation is difficult if not impossible if the reader does not understand the meaning of the words. This tendency was held in check in Smith's later works of which The Root of Ampoi *is an example. The only previous appearance of this story was in the Spring, 1949 issue of* THE ARKHAM SAMPLER, *a literary quarterly of outstanding quality edited and published by August W. Derleth. The circulation of this quarterly was only in the hundreds, therefore few science fiction lovers ever had the opportunity to read* The Root of Ampoi.

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SUMMERS

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A CIRCUS had arrived in Auburn. The siding at the station was crowded with long lines of cars from which issued a medley of exotic howls, growls, snarls and trumpetings. Elephants and zebras and dromedaries were led along the main streets; and many of the freaks and performers wandered about the town.

Two bearded ladies passed with the graceful air and walk of women of fashion. Then came a whole troupe of midgets, trudging along with the look of mournful, sophisticated children. And then I saw the giant, who was slightly more than eight feet tall and magnificently built, with no sign of the disproportion which often attend giantism. He was merely a fine physical specimen of the ordinary man, somewhat more than life-size. And even at first glance, there was something about his features and his gait which suggested a seaman.

I am a doctor; and the man provoked my medical curiosity. His abnormal bulk and height, without trace of acromegaly, was something I had never happened to meet before.

He must have felt my interest, for he returned my gaze with a speculative eye; and then, lurching in sailor-like fashion, he came over to me.

"I say, sir, could a chap buy a drink in this 'ere town?"

I made a quick decision.

"Come with me," I replied. "I'm an allopath; and I can tell without asking that you're a sick man."

We were only a block from my office. I steered the giant up the stairs and into my private sanctum. He almost filled the place, even when he sat down at my urging. I brought out a bottle of rye and poured a liberal glassful for him. He downed it with manifest appreciation. He had worn an air of mild depression when I first met him; now he began to brighten.

"You wouldn't think, to look at me, that I wasn't always a bloomin' giant," he soliloquized.

"Have another drink," I suggested.

After the second glass, he resumed a little mournfully: "No, sir, Jim Knox wasn't always a damn circus freak."

Then, with little urging on my part, he told me his story.

KNOX, an adventurous Cockney, had followed half the seas of the world as a common sailor and boatswain in his younger years. He had visited many strange places, had known many bizarre experiences. Before he had reached the age of thirty, his restless and daring disposition led him to undertake an incredibly fantastic quest.

The events preceding this

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quest were somewhat unusual in themselves. Ship-wrecked by a wild typhoon in the Banda Sea, and apparently the one survivor, Knox had drifted for two days on a hatch torn from the battered and sinking vessel. Then, rescued by a native fishing-proa, he had been carried to Salawatti.

The Rajah of Salawatti, an old and monkey-like Malay, was very nice to Knox. The Rajah was a teller of voluminous tales; and the boatswain was a patient listener. On this basis of congeniality, Knox became an honored guest for a month or more in the Rajah's palace. Here, among other wonders retailed by his host, he heard for the first time the rumor of a most remarkable Papuan tribe.

This unique tribe dwelt on a well-nigh inaccessible plateau of the Arfak Mountains. The women were nine feet tall and white as milk; but the men, strangely, were of normal stature and darker hue. They were friendly to the rare travelers who reached their domains; and they would trade for glass beads and mirrors the pigeons' blood rubies in which their mountain-slopes abounded. As proof of the latter statement, the Rajah showed Knox a large, flawless, uncut ruby, which he claimed had come from this region.

Knox was hardly inclined to credit the item about the giant women; but the rubies sounded far less improbable. It was characteristic of him that, with little thought of danger, difficulty, or the sheer absurdity of such a venture, he made up his mind at once to visit the Arfak Mountains.

Bidding farewell to his host, who mourned the loss of a good listener, he continued his odyssey. By means that he failed to specify in his story, Knox procured two sackfuls of mirrors and glass beads, and managed to reach the coast of northwestern New Guinea. At Andai, in Arfak, he hired a guide who purported to know the whereabouts of the giant Amazons, and struck boldly inland toward the mountains.

The guide, who was half Malay and half Papuan, bore one of the sacks of baubles on his shoulders; and Knox carried the other. He fondly hoped to return with the two sacks full of smouldering dark-red rubies.

It was a little known land. Some of the peoples were reputed to be head-hunters and cannibals; but Knox found them friendly enough. But somehow, as they went on, the guide began to exhibit a growing haziness in his geography. When they reached the middle slopes of the Arfak range, Knox realized that the guide knew little more than he himself regarding the location of the ruby-strewn plateau.

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They went on through the steepening forest. Before them, above trees that were still tall and semi-tropical, arose the granite scraps and crags of a high mountain-wall, behind which the afternoon sun had disappeared. In the early twilight, they camped at the foot of a seemingly insuperable cliff.

KNOX awoke in a blazing yellow dawn, to discover that his guide had departed, taking one of the sacks of trinkets—which, from a savage viewpoint, would constitute enough capital to set the fellow up in business for life. Knox shrugged his shoulders and swore a little. The guide wasn't much of a loss; but he didn't like having his jewel-purchasing power diminished by half.

He looked at the cliffs above. Tier on tier they towered in the glow of dawn, with tops scarce distinguishable from the clouds about them. Somehow, the more he looked the surer he became that they were the cliffs which guarded the hidden plateau. With their silence and inaccessible solitude, their air of eternal reserve and remoteness, they couldn't be anything else but the ramparts of a realm of titan women and pigeon's blood rubies.

He shouldered his pack and followed the granite wall in search of a likely starting-place for the climb he had determined to attempt. The upright rock was

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smooth as a metal sheet, and didn't offer a toehold of a spider monkey. But at last he came to a deep chasm which formed the bed of a summer-dried cataract. He began to ascend the chasm, which was no mean feat in itself, for the streambed was a series of high shelves, like a giant stairway.

Half the time he dangled by his fingers without a toehold, or stretched on tiptoe and felt precariously for a finger-grip. The climb was a ticklish business, with death on the pointed rocks below as the penalty of the least miscalculation.

He dared not look back on the way he had climbed in that giddy chasm. Toward noon, he saw above him the menacing overhang of a huge crag, where the straitening gully ceased in a black-mouthed cavern.

He scrambled up the final shelf into the cave, hoping that it led, as was likely, to an upper entrance made by the mountain torrent. By the light of struck matches, he scaled a slippery incline. The cave soon narrowed; and Knox could often brace himself between the walls, as if in a chimney's interior.

After long upward groping, he discerned a tiny glimmering ahead, like a pin-prick in the solid gloom. Knox, nearly worn out with his efforts, was immensely heartened. But again the cave narrowed, till he could squeeze no farther with the pack on his back. He slid back a little distance and removed the sack, which he then proceeded to push before him up a declivity of forty-five degrees. In those days, Knox was of average height and somewhat slender; but even so, he could barely wriggle through the last ten feet of the cavern.

He gave the sack a final heave and landed it on the surface without. Then he squirmed through the opening and fell exhausted in the sunlight. He lay almost at the fountain-head of the dried stream, in a saucer-like hollow at the foot of a gentle slope of granite beyond whose bare ridge the clouds were white and near.

Knox congratulated himself on his gift as an alpine climber. He felt no doubt whatever that he had reached the threshold of the hidden realm of rubies and giant women.

SUDDENLY, as he lay there, several men appeared against the clouds, on the ridge above. Striding like mountaineers, they came toward him with excited jabberings and gestures of amazement; and he rose and stood awaiting them.

Knox must have been a singular spectacle. His clothing and face were bestreaked with dirt and with the stains of parti-col-

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ored ores acquired in his passage through the cavern. The approaching men seemed to regard him with a sort of awe.

They were dressed in short reddish-purple tunics, and wore leather sandals. They did not belong to any of the lowland types: their skin was a light sienna, and their features were good even according to European standards. All were armed with long javelins but seemed friendly. Wide-eyed, and apparently somewhat timorous, they addressed Knox in a language which bore no likeness to any Melanesian tongue he had ever heard.

He replied in all the languages of which he had the least smattering; but plainly they could not understand him. Then he untied his sack, took out a double handful of beads, and tried to convey by pantomine the information that he was a trader from remote lands.

The men nodded their heads. Beckoning him to follow them, they returned toward the cloud-rimmed ridge. Knox trudged along behind them, feeling quite sure that he had found the people of the Rajah's tale.

Topping the ridge, he saw the perspectives of a long plateau, full of woods, streams and cultivated fields. In the mild and slanting sunlight, he and his guides descended a path among flowering willow-herbs and rhododendrons to the plateau. There it soon became a well-trodden road, running through forests of dammar and fields of wheat. Houses of rough-hewn stone with thatched roofs, evincing a higher civilization than the huts of the Papuan seaboard, began to appear at intervals.

Men, garbed in the same style as Knox's guides, were working in the fields. Then Knox perceived several women, standing together in an idle group. Now he was compelled to believe the whole story about the hidden people, for these women were eight feet or more in height and had the proportions of shapely goddesses! Their complexion was not of a milky fairness, as in the Rajah's tale, but was tawny and cream-like and many shades lighter than that of the men. Knox felt a jubilant excitement as they turned their calm gaze upon him and watched him with the air of majestic statues. He had found the legendary realm; and he peered among the pebbles and grasses of the wayside, half expecting to see them intersown with rubies. None was in evidence, however.

A town appeared, circling a sapphire lake with one-storied but well-built houses laid out in regular streets. Many people were strolling or standing about; and all the women were tawny

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giantesses, and all the men were of average stature, with umber or sienna complexions.

A crowd gathered about Knox; and his guides were questioned in a quite peremptory manner by some of the titan females, who eyed the boatswain with embarrassing intentness. He divined at once the respect and obeisance paid these women by the men, and inferred the superior position which they held. They all wore the tranquil and assured look of empresses.

KNOX was led to a building near the lake. It was larger and more pretentious than the others. The roomy interior was arrayed with roughly pictured fabrics and furnished with chairs and couches of ebony. The general effect was rudely sybaritic and palatial, and much enhanced by the unusual height of the ceilings.

In a sort of audience-room, a woman sat enthroned on a broad dais. Several others stood about her like a bodyguard. She wore no crown, no jewels, and her dress differed in no wise from the short kilts of the other women. But Knox knew that he had entered the presence of a queen. The woman was fairer than the rest, with long rippling chestnut hair and fine oval features. The gaze that she turned upon Knox was filled with a feminine mingling of mildness and severity.

The boatswain assumed his most gallant manner, which must have been a little nullified by his dirt-smeared face and apparel. He bowed before the giantess; and she addressed him with a few soft words in which he sensed a courteous welcome. Then he opened his pack and selected a mirror and a string of blue beads, which he offered to the queen. She accepted the gifts gravely, showing neither pleasure nor surprise.

After dismissing the men who had brought Knox to her presence, the queen turned and spoke to her female attendants. They came forward and gave Knox to understand that he must accompany them. They led him to an open court, containing a huge bath fed by the waters of the blue lake. Here, in spite of his protests and strugglings, they undressed him as if he had been a little boy. Then they plunged him into the water and scrubbed him thoroughly with scrapers of stiff vegetable fiber. One of them brought him a brown tunic and a pair of sandals in lieu of his former raiment.

Though somewhat discomforted and abashed by this summary treatment, Knox couldn't help feeling like a different man after his renovation. And when the women brought in a meal of taro and millet-cake and roast pigeon,

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piled on enormous platters, he began to forgive them for his embarassment.

Two of his fair attendants remained with him during the meal; and afterwards they gave him a lesson in their language by pointing at various objects and naming them. Knox soon acquired a knowledge of much domestic nomenclature.

The queen herself appeared later and proceeded to take a hand in his instruction. Her name, he learned, was Mabousa. Knox was an apt pupil; and the day's lesson was plainly satisfactory to all concerned. Knox realized more clearly than before that the queen was a beautiful woman; but he wished that she was not quite so large and imposing. He felt so juvenile beside her. The queen, on her part, seemed to regard Knox with a far from unfavorable gravity. He saw that she was giving him a good deal of thought and consideration.

Knox almost forgot the rubies of which he had come in search; and when he remembered them, he decided to wait till he had learned more of the language before broaching the subject.

A room in the palace was assigned to him; and he inferred that he could remain indefinitely as Mabousa's guest. He ate at the same table with the queen and her half-dozen attendants. It seemed that he was the only man in the establishment. The chairs were all designed for giantesses, with one exception, which resembled the high chair in which a child sits at a table among its elders. Knox occupied this chair.

MANY days went by; and he learned enough of the language for all practical purposes. It was a tranquil but far from unpleasant life. He soon grew familiar with the general conditions of life in the country ruled by Mabousa, which was called Ondoar. It was quite isolated from the world without, for the mountain walls around it could be scaled only at the point which Knox had so fortuitously discovered. Few strangers had ever obtained entrance. The people were prosperous and contented, leading a pastoral existence under the benign but absolute matriarchy of Mabousa. The women governed their husbands by sheer virtue of physical superiority; but there seemed to be fully as much domestic amity as in the households of countries where a reverse dominion prevails.

Knox wondered greatly about the superior stature of the women, which struck him as being a strange provision of nature. Somehow he did not venture to ask any questions; and no one volunteered to tell him the secret.

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He kept an eye open for rubies, and was puzzled by the paucity of these gems. A few interior rubies, as well as small sapphires and emeralds, were worn by some of the men as earring pendants, tough none of the women was addicted to such ornaments. Knox wondered if they didn't have a lot of rubies stored away somewhere. He had come there to trade for red corundum and had carried a whole sack-load of the requisite medium of barter up an impossible mountain-side; so he was loath to relinquish the idea.

One day he resolved to open the subject with Mabousa. For some reason, he never quite knew why, it was hard to speak of such matters to the dignified and lovely giantess. But business was business.

He was groping for suitable words, when he suddenly noticed that Mabousa too had something on her mind. She had grown uncommonly silent and the way she kept looking at him was disconcerting and even embarrassing. He wondered what was the matter; also, he began to wonder if these people were cannibalistic. Her gaze was so eager and avid.

Before he could speak of the rubies and his willingness to buy them with glass beads, Mabousa startled him by coming out with a flatly phrased proposal of marriage. To say the least, Knox was unprepared. But it seemed uncivil, as well as unpolitic, to refuse. He had never been proposed to before by a queen of a giantess, and he thought it would be hardly the proper etiquette to decline a heart and hand of such capacity. Also, as Mabousa's husband, he would be in a most advantageous position to negotiate for rubies. And Mabousa was undeniably attractive, even though she was built on a grand scale. After a little hemming and hawing, he accepted her proposal, and was literally swept off his feet as the lady gathered him to the gargantuan charms of her bosom.

THE wedding proved to be a very simple affair: a mere matter of verbal agreement in the presence of several female witnesses. Knox was amazed by the ease and rapidity with which he assumed the bonds of holy matrimony.

He learned a lot of things from his marriage with Mabousa. He found at the wedding-supper that the high chair he had been occupying at the royal table was usually reserved for the queen's consort. Later, he learned the secret of the women's size and stature. All the children, boys and girls, were of ordinary size at birth; but the girls were fed by their mothers on a certain root which caused them to in-

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crease in height and bulk beyond the natural limits.

The root was gathered on the highest mountain slopes. Its peculiar virtue was mainly due to a mode of preparation whose secret had been carefully guarded by the women and handed down from mother to daughter. Its use had been known for several generations. At one time the men had been the ruling sex; but an accidental discovery of the root by a down-trodden wife named Ampoi had soon led to a reversal of this domination. In consequence the memory of Ampoi was highly venerated by the famales, as that of a savioress.

Knox also acquired much other information, on matters both social and domestic. But nothing was ever said about rubies. He was forced to decide that the plenitude of these jewels in Ondoar must have been sheer fable; a purely decorative addition to the story of the giant Amazons.

His marriage led to other disillusionments. As the queen's consort, he had expected to have a share in the government of Ondoar, and had looked forward to a few kingly prerogatives. But he soon found that he was merely a male adjunct of Mabousa, with no legal rights, no privileges other than those which she, out of wifely affection, might choose to accord him. She was kind and loving, but also strong-minded, not to say bossy; and he learned that he couldn't do anything or go anywhere without first consulting her and obtaining permission.

She would sometimes reprimand him, would often set him right on some point of Ondoarian etiquette, or the general conduct of life, in a sweet but strict manner; and it never occurred to her that he might even wish to dispute any of her mandates. He, however, was irked more and more by this feminine tyranny. His male pride, his manly British spirit, revolted. If the lady had been of suitable size he would, in his own phrase, "have knocked her about a little." But, under the circumstances, any attempt to chasten her by main strength hardly seemed advisable.

Along with all this, he grew quite fond of her in his fashion. There were many things that endeared her to him; and he felt that she would be an exemplary wife, if there were only some way of curbing her deplorable tendency to domineer.

TIME went on, as it has a habit of doing. Mabousa seemed to be well enough satisfied with her spouse. But Knox brooded a good deal over the false position in which he felt that she had placed him, and the daily injury to his manhood. He wished that there

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were some way of correcting matters, of asserting his natural rights and putting Mabousa in her place.

One day he remembered the root on which the women of Ondoar were fed. Why couldn't he get hold of some of it and grow big himself like Mabousa, or bigger? Then he would be able to handle her in the proper style. The more he thought about it, the more this appealed to him as an ideal solution of his marital difficulties.

The main problem, however, was to obtain the root. He questioned some of the other men in a discreet way, but none of them could tell him anything about it. The women never permitted the men to accompany them when they gathered the stuff; and the process of preparing it for consumption was carried on in deep caverns. Several men had dared to steal the food in past years; two of them, indeed, had grown to giant stature in what they had stolen. But all had been punished by the women with lifelong exile from Ondoar.

All this was rather discouraging. Also, it served to increase Knox's contempt for the men of Ondoar, whom he looked upon as a spineless, effeminate lot. However, he didn't give up his plan. But, after much deliberation and scheming, he found himself no nearer to a solution.

Perhaps he would have resigned himself, as better men have done, to an inevitable lifelong henpecking. But at last, in the birth of a female baby to Mabousa and himself, he found the opportunity he had been seeking.

The child was like any other girl infant, and Knox was no less proud of it, no less imbued with the customary parental sentiments, than other fathers have been. It did not occur to him, till the baby was old enough to be weaned and fed on the special food, that he would now have in his own home a first-rate chance to appropriate some of this food for his personal use.

The simple and artless Mabousa was wholly without suspicion of such unlawful designs. Male obedience to the feministic law of the land was so thoroughly taken for granted that she even showed him the strange foodstuff and often fed the child in his presence. Nor did she conceal from him the large earthen jar in which she kept her reserve supply.

The jar stood in the palace kitchen, among others filled with more ordinary staples of diet. One day, when Mabousa had gone to the country on some political errand, and the waiting-women were all preoccupied with other than culinary matters, Knox stole into the kitchen and

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carried away a small bagful of the stuff, which he then hid in his own room. In his fear of detection, he felt more of an actual thrill than at any time since the boyhood days when he had pilfered apples from London street-barrows behind the backs of the venders.

THE stuff looked like a fine variety of sage, and had an aromatic smell and spicy taste. Knox ate a little of it at once but dared not indulge himself to the extent of a full meal for fear that the consequences would be visible. He had watched the incredible growth of the child, which had gained the proportions of a normal six-year old girl in a fortnight under the influence of the miraculous nutrient; and he did not wish to have his theft discovered, and the further use of the food prevented, in the first stage of his own development toward gianthood.

He felt that some sort of seclusion would be advisable till he could attain the bulk and stature which would ensure a position as master in his own household. He must somehow remove himself from all female supervision during the period of growth.

This, for one so thoroughly subject to petticoat government, with all his goings and comings minutely regulated, was no mean problem. But again fortune favored Knox; for the hunting season in Ondoar had now arrived; a season in which many of the men were permitted by their wives to visit the higher mountains and spend days or weeks in tracking down a certain agile species of alpine deer, known as the *okloh*.

Perhaps Mabousa wondered a little at the sudden interest shown by Knox in *okloh*-hunting, and his equally sudden devotion to practice with the javelins used by the hunters. But she saw no reason for denying him permission to make the desired trip; merely stipulating that he should go in company with certain other dutiful husbands, and should be very careful of dangerous cliffs and crevasses.

The company of other husbands was not exactly in accord with Knox's plan; but he knew better than to argue the point. He had contrived to make several more visits to the palace pantry, and had stolen enough of the forbidden food to turn him into a robust and wife-taming titan. Somehow, on that trip among the mountains, in spite of the meek and law-abiding males with whom he was condemned to go, he would find chances to consume all he had stolen. He would return a conquering Anakim, a roaring and swaggering Goliath; and everyone, especially Mabousa, would stand from under.

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Knox hid the food, disguised as a bag of millet meal, in his private supply of provisions. He also carried some of it in his pockets, and would eat a mouthful or two whenever the other men weren't looking. And at night, when they were all sleeping quietly, he would steal to the bag and devour the aromatic stuff by the handful.

The result was truly phenomenal, for Knox could watch himself swell after the first square meal. He broadened and shot up inch by inch, to the manifest bewilderment of his companions, none of whom, at first, was imaginative enough to suspect the true reason. He saw them eying him with a sort of speculative awe and curiosity, such as civilized people would display before a wild man from Borneo. Obviously they regarded his growth as a kind of biological anomaly, or perhaps as part of the queer behavior that might well be expected from a foreigner of doubtful antecedents.

The hunters were now in the highest mountains, at the northernmost end of Ondoar. Here, among stupendous riven crags and piled pinnacles, they pursued the elusive *okloh;* and Knox began to attain a length of limb that enabled him to leap across chasms over which the others could not follow.

At last one or two of them must have got suspicious. They got to watching Knox, and one night they surprised him in the act of devouring the sacred food. They tried to warn him, with a sort of holy horror in their demeanor, that he was doing a dreadful and forbidden thing, and would bring himself the direst consequences.

KNOX, who was beginning to feel as well as look like an actual giant, told them to mind their own business. Moreover, he went on to express his frank and uncensored opinion of the sapless, decadent and effeminate males of Ondoar. After that the men left him alone, but murmured fearfully among themselves and watched his every movement with apprehensive glances. Knox despised them so thoroughly, that he failed to attach any special significance to the furtive disappearance of two members of the party. Indeed, at the time, he hardly noticed that they had gone.

After a fortnight of alpine climbing, the hunters had slain their due quota of long-horned and goat-footed *okloh;* and Knox had consumed his entire store of the stolen food and had grown to proportions which, he felt sure, would enable him to subdue his domineering helpmate and show her the proper inferiority of the female sex. It was time to return:

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Knox's companions would not have dreamt of exceeding the limit set by the women, who had enjoined them to come back at the end of a fortnight; and Knox was eager to demonstrate his new-won superiority of bulk and brawn.

As they came down from the mountains and crossed the cultivated plain, Knox saw that the other men were lagging behind more and more, with a sort of fearfulness and shrinking timidity. He strode on before them, carrying three full-sized *okloh* slung over his shoulders, as a lesser man would have carried so many rabbits.

The fields and roads were deserted, and none of the titan women were in sight anywhere. Knox wondered a little about this; but feeling himself so much the master of the general situation, he did not over-exert his mind in curious conjectures.

However, as they approached the town, the desolation and silence became a trifle ominous. Knox's fellow-hunters were obviously stricken with dire and growing terror. But Knox did not feel that he should lower his dignity by even asking the reason.

They entered the streets, which were also strangely quiet. There was no evidence of life, other than the pale and frightened faces of a few men that peered from windows and furtively opened doors.

AT last they came in sight of the palace. Now the mystery was explained, for apparently all the women of Ondoar had gathered in the square before the building! They were drawn up in a massive and appallingly solid formation, like an army of giant Amazons; and their utter stillness was more dreadful than the shouting and tumult of battlefields. Knox felt an unwilling but irresistable dismay before the swelling thews of their mighty arms, the solemn heaving of the gargantuan bosoms, and the awful and austere gaze with which they regarded him in unison.

Suddenly he perceived that he was quite alone—the other men had faded away like shadows, as if they did not even dare to remain and watch his fate. He felt an almost undeniable impulse to flee; but his British valor prevented him from yielding to it. Pace by pace he forced himself to go on toward the embattled women.

They waited for him in stony silence, immovable as caryatides. He saw Mabousa in the front rank, her serving-women about her. She watched him with eyes in which he could read nothing but unutterable reproach. She did not speak; and somehow the jaunty words with which he had

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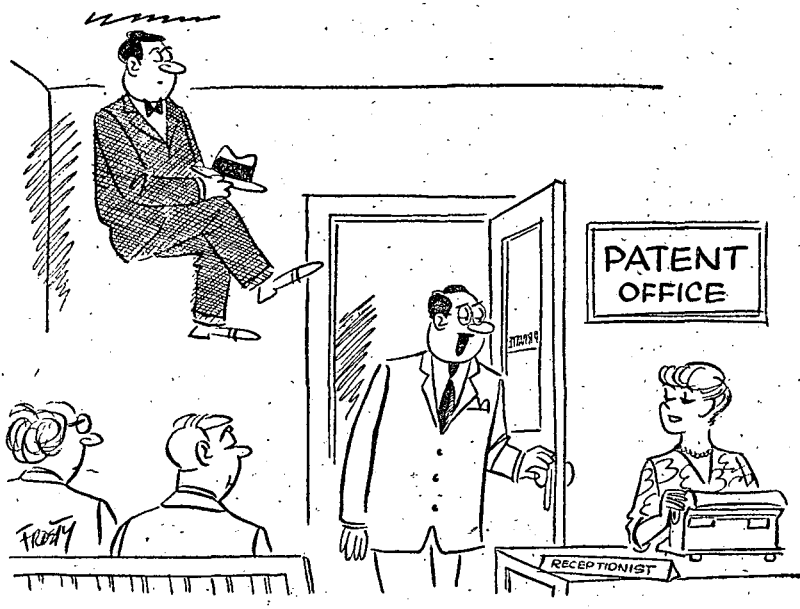
intended to greet her were congealed on his lips.

All at once, with a massed and terrible striding movement, the women surrounded Knox. He lost sight of Mabousa in the solid wall of titanesses. Great, brawny hands were grasping him, tearing the spear from his fingers and the *okloh* from his shoulders. He struggled as became a doughty Briton. But one man, even though he had eaten the food of giantesses, could do nothing against the whole tribe of eight-foot females.

Maintaining a silence more formidable than any outcry, they bore him through the town and along the road by which he had entered Ondoar, and up the mountain path to the outmost ramparts of the land. There, from the beetling crag above the gully he had climbed, they lowered him with a tackle of heavy ropes to the dry torrent-bed two hundred feet below, and left him to find his way down the perilous mountainside and back to the outer world that would accept him henceforward only as a circus freak.

THE END



"Send in the man with the anti-gravity machine."

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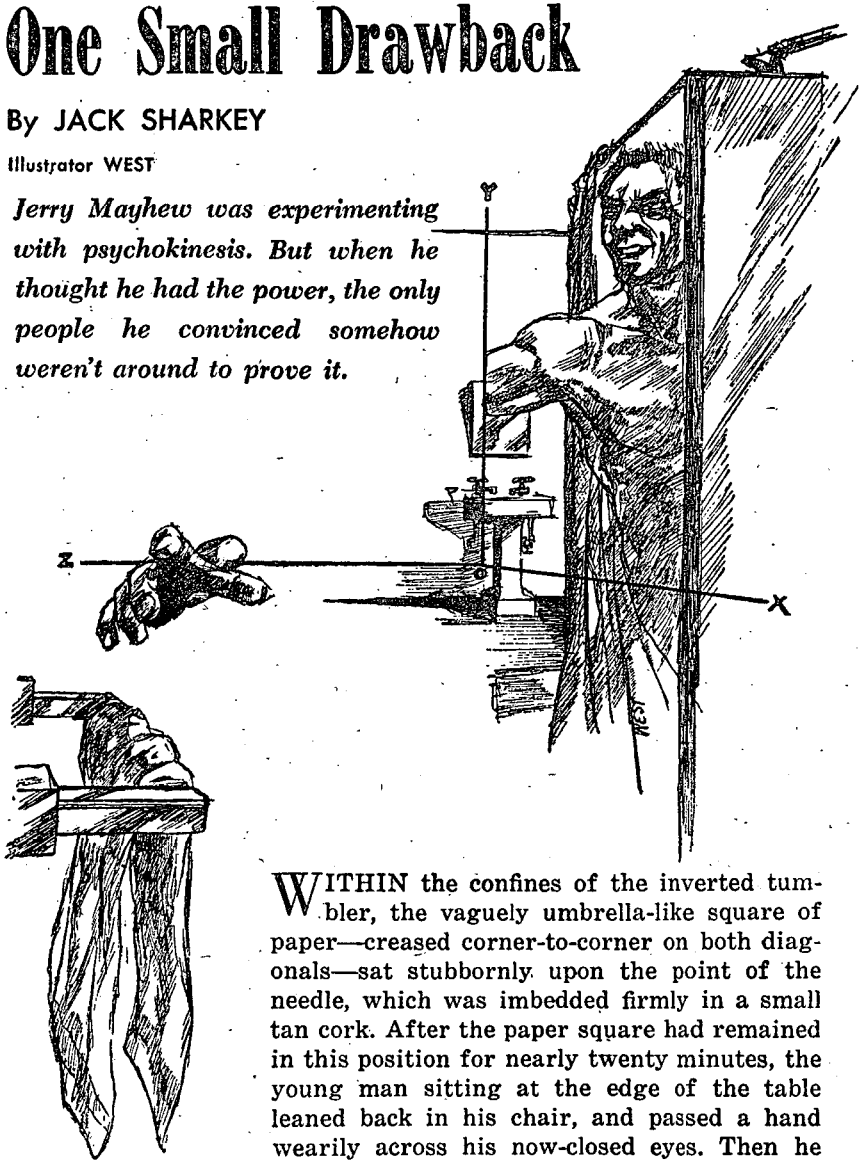
One Small Drawback

By JACK SHARKEY

Illustrator WEST

Jerry Mayhew was experimenting with psychokinesis. But when he thought he had the power, the only people he convinced somehow weren't around to prove it.



WITHIN the confines of the inverted tumbler, the vaguely umbrella-like square of paper—creased corner-to-corner on both diagonals—sat stubbornly upon the point of the needle, which was imbedded firmly in a small tan cork. After the paper square had remained in this position for nearly twenty minutes, the young man sitting at the edge of the table leaned back in his chair, and passed a hand wearily across his now-closed eyes. Then he peeked across his knuckles at his companion.

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"Well," grinned Jerry Mayhew, "that seems to be that."

"You haven't been at it even half an hour," his vis-a-vis observed with a smile in which the frank humor softened the mockery. "Most people give it at least an hour."

"With what result?" asked Jerry, with open sarcasm.

The other man laughed. "Much the same, I'm afraid. After all —" He lifted the tumbler, and the motion set to stirring an eddy of air that sufficed to twirl the delicately balanced paper square. "—it's still only a theory. For all we so-called psychic 'experts' know, this approach to the problem only makes things tougher. Perhaps the ideal beginning for a novice should be with a brick; a cornerstone, even."

The young man raised another tumbler to his lips, and took a long pull at the iced liquid therein, his eyes distant and thoughtful. Then he set it down upon the table once more, and said, "Tell me honestly, doctor; do *you* think psychokinesis is possible?"

The man addressed—Dr. Edmund Baird, of the Norval University Research Board—tilted head and shoulders forward just slightly enough to imply a shrug and the smallest of nods. "I *like* to think it is. Let me put it that way. Oh, I know it hasn't so far been demonstrable, but neither has the theory that a man will die on the face of the sun."

"*Theory!?*" Jerry scoffed.

Baird raised thin grey eyebrows. "That's all it is, you know, until the day some poor astronaut *does* die on the face of the sun. But that's what I mean: Because a thing is not demonstrable, it does not therefore disprove the thing as possible, not by a long shot."

"And you believe that if I sat and stared at that square of paper hard enough, and long enough, I could eventually make it twirl with mind-power alone? And then move on to self-teleportation and continent-lifting?"

"The staring is not necessary, so far as I know, save for its being simply an aid to concentration. And then again—" A rueful quirk twisted the side of his mouth. "—perhaps the concentration is wrong, too. For all I know, the easiest way to influence an object physically with one's mind is to do it by reflex, as it were. A half-hearted, half-thought-out, half-projected thought might shatter a concrete pillbox, so long as the thinker actually believed he could do it."

"Oooh," Jerry groaned, shutting his eyes, "please don't start that again! We only start talking in circles!"

"It's a circular problem," said

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Baird. "To do it, one must believe he can; to believe he can, one must know it is possible; to know that, one must have been able to do it. I didn't promise you it would be easy, Jerry."

"You didn't promise it would be possible, either."

Baird laughed again. "I can hardly promise that, since I still don't know, myself. But I *did* promise my wife I'd be home by midnight, and it's ten to now."

BAIRD rose from his chair, waving off Jerry's automatic offer of assistance, and with his cane made a three-legged movement to the door. Jerry was there before him, and helped him on with his hat and topcoat.

"Thank you for an attentive, comfortable evening," Baird said at the door. "I wish I were as comfortable lecturing in the classroom— And that you were half so attentive."

"Your own theoretical talks are a lot more interesting than the psychology course, I'm afraid, sir."

Baird tendered the younger man a wink. "I feel the same way," he said, then went out into the night. At the end of the walk, guiding his faltering steps with the light that spilled from the still-open door, he turned and said, "You know, Jerry . . . Hypnosis might help— In conditioning the mind, I mean. Remind me, next time I stop over, to have a whack at the problem from your *sub*conscious."

Jerry promised he would, then returned to the dining room of the fraternity house for the empty glasses. As he carried them out to the kitchen for the freshman "pledge" to wash in the morning, his young face was creased with thought.

Leaving the glassware carelessly on the drainboard of the sink, he climbed the stairs to the room he shared with Brad Melik, another senior at Norval. Inside the room, he found Brad snoring lightly in the lower bunk bed. Brad's radio was playing some soft FM pop tunes in the darkened corner by the window, and Jerry crossed the floor and snapped the switch off, gently.

The ensuing quiet, punctuated contrapuntally by a mild muffled snoring from his roommate's bunk, felt like warm velvet pressing in upon his ears. Jerry glanced at his watch, noted the near approach of midnight, then set his gaze upon a pen-and-ink class schedule taped on the wall above his desk. The following day was Friday. He had no morning classes.

"Good," said Jerry, aloud. He slid into the armchair beside his desk, adjusted the gooseneck lamp to angle its light down over his shoulder, then ripped open a fresh pack of cigarettes and lit

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one. After a few thoughtful puffs, he stretched out a long arm to the bookshelf on the wall, snagged the upper rim of a thick volume, and tugged it tilting out into his hand. Scanning the index rapidly, he found the pages he sought, and slumped down further on the end of his spine and started reading.

His cigarette was lying dead in the ashtray, two-thirds of its length undisturbed cylindrical white ash, when he closed the book and scowled.

"I wonder if I could," he mused, in a half-sounded whisper. According to the book, auto-hypnosis was even simpler than getting suggestion from outside sources, if one just knew how to achieve it. The trick was to let the mind relax, to let awareness of surroundings fade away, to cut off all sensory sensation, be it sound, the feel of the chair beneath his body, or the appearance of the room. Then, when the mind was sufficiently dissociated from the body, the *will* took over, and simply gave the body its orders. If the book were correct, the orders would be obeyed.

"But will my *mind* take orders from my *mind?*" Jerry asked himself. The book hadn't quite covered that part of auto-hypnosis to his satisfaction. There was mention made of things like achieving mental tranquillity, or of teaching oneself to awaken at a given hour without benefit of alarm clock, or how to increase one's power of memory. Not, however, a damned thing about the release of a man's psychokinetic powers. If any.

"At least," he thought, wearily, "I have nothing to lose. The worst that can happen is I'll fall asleep in the chair." He lifted the volume once more, and checked to reassure himself that a person simply left in hypnotic "sleep" would drift soon into normal sleep, and awaken "unusually refreshed".

"What the hell," said Jerry. "I can't go wrong."

That decided, he set to work trying self-hypnosis.

THE sense of sight was easily submerged by closing his eyes. Sound was a bit harder, but then Brad twisted around in bed and ceased snoring, and there was nothing more for Jerry to hear but the enveloping silence of the night. And, he found, by lying relaxed and letting himself just *sag*, his bodily sensations grew tenuous and began to ebb away. Final departure of all sensory experience was reached by beginning his strong-willed concentration on his subconscious mind, and thus distracting himself from any sensory messages he might otherwise have received. He pushed his mind toward Knowledge.

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He was floating. He, Jerry, himself, the ego that was Jerry Mayhew hovered isolated in an inky void. He let his thoughts lie calm and dormant for many minutes, then let the tiniest particle of concentration formulate the inner-eye image of a door. The door hung against the void, guarding the pathway to the knowledge he sought. Slowly, carefully, his will reached out and tried to move the door ajar. It remained steady, its position as firmly fixed as though its edges had been fused with cement. Again he tried, and again the door remained shut.

Carefully, Jerry made his will relax its efforts. It was obvious that force of thought was not the answer. He let his will float idly before that singular door in the empty darkness, while he reasoned out the problem. It would seem that the secrets lying in wait beyond the door were not to be pried from their refuge. But —a spark flared in his mind, exciting his consciousness— But if the knowledge could not be taken *out* . . . Could his mind, perhaps, simply enter *in?*

Again his mind approached the door, the door which gave familiar form to the barrier-ness that it actually was. This time, he did not try to move the door ajar. Instead, he let his mind lean upon it, let his inner self gently press its psychic inertia upon the portal, concentrating on the thought of—not moving it—but on the thought of simply *passing* it . . .

And then he was within. And he suddenly Knew.

JERRY blinked his eyes against the warm yellow light, then squinted through them, and finally opened them wide. His back, the lower part of his spine barely still upon the forward edge of the chair, felt as though it were encased in plaster, and his head throbbed dully near the base of his skull where it had propped itself against the upper surface of the chair-back. With an effort, and a few soft curses, he managed to get to his feet, where he arched his back toward normal concavity, and stretched some of the tension from his shoulders.

It was morning, and he'd slept in the chair all the night long. On the floor, the fallen volume caught his eye. He grunted and aimed a kick at it, then reconsidered and simply replaced it upon the bookshelf.

"*That* was a waste," he decided, rubbing the short bristles on his jaw. As always, when he slept in his clothes, he was damp with perspiration. Yawning lustily, and rolling his head on his neck to take out the lingering kinks, he stripped, wrapped a towel about his waist, and—after

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grabbing his soap and shaving gear from his locker, stepped into his Japanese-style shower sandals and padded down the hall toward the frat-house washroom, already crowded.

The shower-spray was hard, hot and stimulating upon his skin, and he turned himself vertically upon an imaginary spit, savoring the blood-stirring tingle of the hissing water. A thin cascade of soap film from his scrubbed forehead slithered down maliciously into his eyes, and stung them unmercifully.

"*Yo!*" he hollered, waggling a bare arm out of the shower stall toward whoever might still be performing his morning ablutions at the sink. "Gimme th' tow'l, damn it!"

His fingers closed over the thick absorbent pile of the towel, and he muttered his thanks as he sopped the painful suds from his eyes. He blinked them open experimentally, gave a final dab to one inner corner, and said, "Damn near burned my—" He stopped, then, because there was nobody to talk to. He looked at the double-hinged door to the corridor, but it wasn't even swinging. Puzzled, still wiping mechanically at his face with the towel, he squelched in his wet sandals across the tiles to the door and looked outside. At the very end of the hall, Brad was just coming out of their room, unshaven and unshowered, heading toward him.

"You could have *called* me—" Brad complained, as he squeezed past Jerry in the doorway. "*I* have classes this morning, if you don't . . . Oh, say, can I borrow your soap? Forgot mine."

Jerry bemusedly handed the bar over to his roommate, then slowly made his way back toward their room. He knew, as surely as he knew that one of the other men might have given him the towel on his way out of the washroom, that no one had done that at all.

The hair prickled slightly on the nape of his neck as he considered the alternative to human agency giving him that towel. The towel-rack was five feet from the mouth of the stall, a tough stretch for one arm, even if he'd leaned out of the stall. And he hadn't. He'd hollered for a towel, reached—And had gotten a towel.

Still enfolded in that towel, he stood in the center of his room, thinking back to his mental exertions of the previous night. Beyond his final success in penetrating that imaginary doorway, his memory failed him. He'd gone in, and then . . . He'd Known . . .

"Known *what*, though?" he muttered. "What did I find out in there, anyhow?"

He scrubbed at his drooling

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hair with the towel, then flung it aside on the bed and commenced dressing. Dr. Baird had a free period coming up in half an hour, and Jerry had a lot he wanted to find out.

AND you're positive that none of your fraternity brothers could have handed you the towel just as he was leaving the room?" asked Baird, his eyes bright and glittery behind his thin spectacles.

Jerry shook his head. "No, sir. Not *that* positive, if you know what I mean. It's just that whoever gave it to me would've had to move like a lightning bolt to get back into his room without my seeing him. Or at least hearing him moving away from the washroom."

Save for themselves, the faculty lounge was empty, though clouded blue with cigarette smoke near the ceiling. Baird leaned back in a leatherette armchair, tapping the tips of his stubby fingers together, thinking.

"Think you could do it again?" he asked, abruptly.

"That's just it, sir," Jerry sighed, nudging his fist into his opened palm, and grinding angrily with the middle knuckle. "I *did* try 'again', after I got back to my room. Felt like an ass, asking Brad's soap to jump into the dish. Especially when it didn't. And my shoes and socks got onto my feet the usual way, too."

"Maybe," Baird observed dryly, "it won't work unless you have soap in your eyes."

"Aw, come on, sir—!"

Baird grinned. "Seriously, though, it might have been the fact that your eyes were shut, and thereby *unable* to tell your brain that you *couldn't* get that towel. It gave you the necessary factor of *belief*."

The sudden jangle of a bell in the corridor was followed by the slamming-open of many doors, and the heavy pounding of hurrying feet. Baird grunted gloomily, then got up slowly from his chair, his hand gripping the cane tightly.

"Sorry, son. I have to get to class, now. But I am interested; very interested. I wish we could talk more of this right now, while it's still fresh in your mind, and unembroidered by fancy, but— Can you meet me in the psychology lab tonight, say about seven?"

"Well, I—I *have* a date, sir, but— Ah, hell, she's not that important. I can break it."

"Good," nodded Baird. "Excellent. I'll see you then, Jerry."

After the door had closed behind the older man, Jerry recalled that students were not permitted in the lounge unless actually consulting a teacher, so he went to the door, one hand fum-

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bling at the breast pocket of his sportshirt for a cigarette. Only then did he remember that he had—in his eagerness to see Baird—left them back in his room on the desk.

"Holy hell!" he choked, shaken.

Because his fingers, uninformed by his briefly forgetful mind that they could not find the cigarettes in his pocket, had gone ahead and found them there. He stood frozen in the doorway for one short second, then he was springing after Baird down the length of the hall.

He nearly knocked the older man down in his haste, and when he'd blurted out this second occurrence—to the intrigued glances of passing students, who caught his monumental excitement if not his exact words—Jerry was surprised to see, not delight, but sharp suspicion in Baird's bright grey eyes.

"Sir, you— You *believe* me, don't you?" he faltered.

"Yes . . ." said Baird, his voice at once commiserating and clinically aloof. "That is to say, I believe that *you* believe you." Pausing just long enough to let the unnerving implication of this statement register on the young man, he added, "I think my class can wait, after all, Jerry." A pale smile tweaked the corners of his mouth. "I doubt if there will be many tears shed at my unaccustomed absence. Coffee at the Union Building is—as I recall my own undergraduate days—much more fun than fifty-five minutes of note-taking. Come with me."

"But sir— You don't think I'm . . ."

"Nuts? Well, perhaps, but don't let it worry you. Every man, in his own way, is slightly screwy. Now come along. Madge will be doing the shopping about now, and we'll have my house to ourselves for a few hours."

"But your classes, sir—"

"Only important because one goes there to acquire knowledge. I consider my own acquisition of knowledge as vital a matter as my students'. They want to learn from me; I want to learn from you. Not another word, now, Jerry. Come along."

AFTER filling Dr. Baird in on even the most trivial details concerning the two separate occurrences, Jerry added, uneasily, "But if you believe the possibility of psychokinesis, sir, why are you going to such great lengths to doubt what seem to be two demonstrations?"

"I was thinking only of your mind, son," said Baird, not unkindly. "I don't mean, at all, the fact that you might be self-deluded. I mean the fact that if these things *do* happen, but happen only when no one else is there to observe them, *you* might

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begin to suspect your sanity. Auto-hypnosis is no toy. Last night, you meddled with a power that even experts approach on tiptoe, as it were. You see, Jerry, if there *isn't* a hidden power in your mind, and you have hypnotically commanded yourself to *find* this power—Well, your subconscious might well be forced to *invent* these so-called 'occurences'."

"You mean that, if I find I can do all sorts of things to objects—influence them physically with my mind—I won't be able to tell if I'm doing the things for real, or simply imagining they are occurring . . . Is that it, sir?"

Baird nodded solemnly. "And that is why I am so deeply concerned. If your manifestations are true, or if they are false, your mind will have no way of knowing. It will not be able to trust what it perceives through the medium of your senses. And, conceivably, the state may be reached in which if *nothing* untoward occurs, you will begin to doubt *that*."

"How so, sir?" asked Jerry, both fascinated and repelled by the statement.

"If you reach for an apple, say, and pick it up in your hand, you might wonder if you actually *have* used your hand, or if your subconscious—sensing that you dread believing in your new-found power—has merely deluded you into *thinking* you are lifting the apple manually, when actually it has flown from the fruit-bowl right to your lips. Do you see?"

Jerry nodded, grimly. "It means that I could start driving myself nuts *whatever* happens. Like I bought me a one-way ticket to the funny-farm."

"Exactly," said Baird. "Which is why it is now imperative that you demonstrate this power of yours for an *outside* viewer. Myself. If *I* witness the occurrence, then we'll know you're all right. But if you alone see the thing happen, I can tell you so, and we'll know what to do for you."

"We will?" said Jerry, who'd begun to feel cold and afraid until the older man's final statement.

"Why, certainly. Nothing simpler. If it turns out that you are simply self-deluded, then *I* will hypnotize you, and remove the suggestion you gave your brain last night. But if the power *does* function—" A devilish grin creased Baird's friendly face. "—then it's heigh-ho for *Life* Magazine's cover, the Nobel Prize, and our accepting payola from the Federal Government for the favor of not teleporting the ingots out of Fort Knox!"

Jerry, taken unawares by the man's sudden surge of youthful glee, burst into laughter. It felt good to laugh.

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"Now, now," said Baird, composing himself. "No celebrating yet. First we'll have to see a demonstration."

"But how can we—?" Jerry began.

"Ssh!" Baird flailed an agitated hand at Jerry. "I'm thinking . . . Let me see, now. It seems that both these events occurred when you were completely unaware that they could *not* occur, correct?"

Jerry nodded, his eyes bright with suppressed excitement.

". . . Ah!" Baird snapped his fingers sharply. "I have it! Close your eyes . . . There, that's it. Now, I'll just—uh—reach over here on the table and pick up a magazine . . . Now here is my — Keep the eyes *shut*— Here is my idea. I am going to hand you this magazine, Jerry. Or perhaps I am *not*. Do you follow me?"

Jerry, leaning back in the chair with his eyes tightly shut, grinned and nodded. "All I have to do is reach out for it, right? And, one way or the other, I should get it."

"Exactly. Now reach for it."

THE young man's hand stretched forward, fingers wide and ready, in the direction of the teacher's voice. In a second, he felt the brush of cool glossy paper against his fingertips, and gripped tightly. He opened his eyes.

The old man was gone and Jerry's eyes came to horrified focus on the stout wooden cane, still leaning against the arm of the chair. To Jerry's mind returned the words of Dr. Baird, with chill realization. . . .

"The fact . . ." the old man had said, "that these things happen only when no one else is there to observe them . . ."

It was not a corollary of the power; it was the result.

* * *

Two students were found missing, later on. One whose shower-clogs and towel were found lying in the fraternity house washroom where he'd last been seen, and the other—Brad Melik—who had vanished from his room where he'd gone to get a forgotten textbook at the moment Jerry had been reaching into his sport-shirt pocket for cigarettes that lay on the desk in his room.

When the terrible import of these disappearances came home to Jerry, he had "a complete nervous breakdown", and was sent to a sanitarium to recuperate.

A week later, when the physician drove out to check on his patient, he found his room empty, and his belongings missing, too. Jerry had wandered off from the "funny-farm".

The guards hadn't tried to stop him.

There weren't any guards. Not any more. **THE END**

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STRANGER IN PARADOX

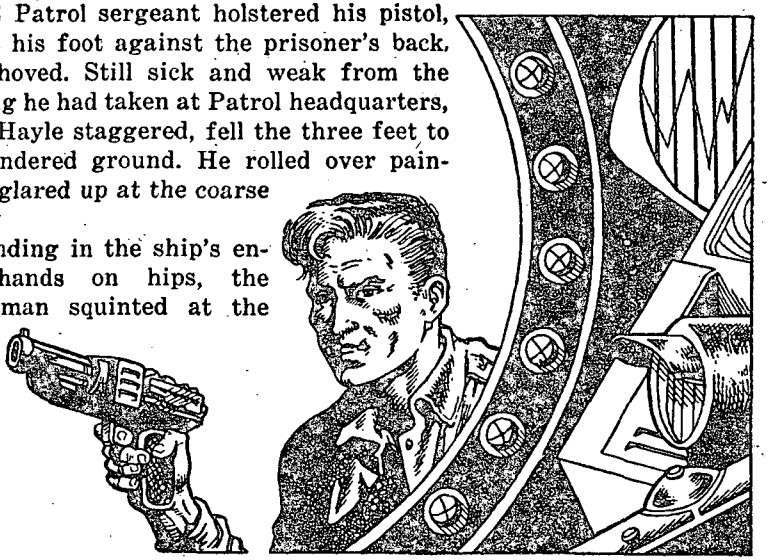
By KEITH LAUMER

Illustrator ADKINS

It was kill or be killed . . . unless a man was smart enough to beat the Patrol at its own game. Hayle was smart enough. Now all he needed was one little bit of luck . . . like a shattered Eye.

THE Patrol sergeant holstered his pistol, put his foot against the prisoner's back, and shoved. Still sick and weak from the beating he had taken at Patrol headquarters, Troy Hayle staggered, fell the three feet to the cindered ground. He rolled over painfully, glared up at the coarse face.

Standing in the ship's entry, hands on hips, the Patrolman squinted at the



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black sky, the surrounding wall of tangled jungle.

"OK, you're on your own," he said. "This here is Camp Paradox. You pull your time now like a smart boy. Don't try no fraternizing with the other cons. We just got the one rule." The Patrolman turned his eyes on Hayle. "Nobody breaks it."

Hayle got to his feet. The Patrol sergeant spat in the dust, leaned to pick up a flat bundle, canvas wrapped, tossed it into the dust at Hayle's feet.

"If I were you, I wouldn't waste no time," he said. He turned and was gone. The lock cover moved quietly, seated with a click.

Hayle grabbed up the bundle, turned and ran for the shelter of the trees ringing the ravaged clearing. In seconds a killing wave of heat and high-speed particles would wash a radius of fifty yards as the Patrol ship went up. Hayle knew the ship well; until a week ago it had been his property. Under the newly painted inscription 'TMJ L-87' the name 'Tara Lee' could still be made out.

He cleared a fallen log and dived behind the bole of a giant ironwood tree as the vivid blue glare of the drive flared out. He hugged the ground until the rumble of displaced air died away, then yanked at the wires binding the flat package; they were tough, tightly twisted. He pried an end loose, worked at it. One loop came free, another. He raked the rest of the binding away, dug at the lacing closing the end of the canvas bag, watching the surrounding forest as he worked, pausing every few seconds to listen. The inmates had seen him landed, of course; only their fear of each other kept them back for the moment. The time to jump a man was when he was new, fresh from outside. Hayle knew that much from rumor and the hints thrown out by the patrolmen.

The lacing parted, and Hayle ripped the bag open. There was no telling what was in it. He hoped for shoes and a gun; any kind of gun. Sometimes, he had heard, the patrol boys slipped one in just for the hell of it, especially if things were too quiet in Camp.

Hayle stared at the blunt shortsword which slipped from the canvas. He wondered where they had looted the battered relic. He dug deeper; a short length of nylon rope and a permatch. Not much to go up against a nerve gun with. He glanced around once more, then sat up and wrapped the rope around his waist, twisting the end under. He thrust the sword through the rope, and tucked the permatch into the tiny pocket of the coarse prison breeches. There were no other preparations he could make.

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This was his equipment to face a new world.

A large green dragon fly floated overhead, tilting awkwardly in the wind which kept the dust moving. Already he was feeling the need for water. The sun rode high in the dark sky, beating down through arching foliage to parch the littered ground. His face ached from his interview at Patrol headquarters.

He would have to locate water first. He checked the accessibility of the clumsy weapon at his hip, then rose and started down the almost imperceptible slope, into the deeper underbrush. He stopped after a few paces, listening. This time he thought he heard the crack of dry sticks ahead and to the right, abruptly ceasing as he stopped. He touched the sword, moved on.

He heard the sounds again; it was impossible to move silently on this ground. No point in stopping, though; it was as well to meet now as later.

HAYLE hitched at the scarred hilt, searching out of the corner of his eye for a tell-tale movement. If he pretended complete unawareness, that might give a momentary advantage, make the other a little less cautious.

Hayle skirted a low branch, and caught a sudden motion to his left. He jerked the sword free, leaped into the brush. A man scrambled up, darted away. Hayle dropped to the ground, lay silent. If the fellow on the right thought the fleeing man was Hayle, suddenly panicked, and followed . . .

The grass parted beside him, and Hayle lunged, grabbed a pair of legs incased in rawhide boots. With a heave, he threw the man to the ground, then jumped up and stood over him, the sword at his throat.

The man rolled his eyes, choked. He still gripped a foot-long hunting knife in his left hand.

"Listen," Hayle said. "We don't have to kill each other, just because the Patrol wants it that way. Why not join forces and maybe we can work out something . . ."

The man rolled suddenly, struck. Hayle felt the sharp bite of the knife, the grate of the blade on his shin bone. The sword rose and chopped, just once, with frantic force. Hayle stumbled back, gritting his teeth. The other man threshed in the dry brush for a moment, then lay still, his head at a grotesque angle. The dull blade had broken his neck, hardly drawing blood.

Hayle sat down, examined his slashed leg. It was a gaping cut, four inches long and sickeningly deep. But for the bone, it would have been deeper. He ripped a

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strip from the cuff of his trousers, bound it tight around the wound. This was a poor beginning.

He moved on, limping; he heard no one now. He had started out with the idea that he wouldn't play the Patrol's game here, but already he had killed a man. He wondered if the man had been a criminal, or another shanghaied victim like himself. He had an idea that few real criminals were sent here, that this was a special camp for "political" prisoners. Stumbling into the Patrol's 'restricted' area was enough in itself to consign a man to this.

The ground sloped more steeply now, and rotted wood and mosses were moist underfoot. The bush grew lushly here, and tall ferns leaned in the hot wind. Hayle pushed through a stand of sharp-edged grass and found his feet in oozing mud. He went on a few steps, batting vainly at swarming insects, then leaned and tasted the water. It seemed good enough. There wasn't much point in hesitating; he would have to drink it eventually.

He leaned over, and a smashing weight drove him face forward into the shallow water. Strangling, he fought, got his knees under him, drove his feet hard against the bottom, twisting. One hand was free now, and Hayle reached blindly back, felt a shoulder, and dug in his fingers. His attacker cried out, pulling back, and Hayle's head was above water. He drew an agonizing breath, threw himself face down again, twisting. Overbalanced, the other fell forward, and Hayle tore free, lunged and found the man's throat. Cartilage crushed beneath his thumbs. He ignored the blows from flailing arms and legs; when the body was still, he rose, staggered back to shore.

He lay on the ground, gasping. Mud stung his eyes, grated on his teeth. He hadn't understood before what savagery he faced. His plan of enlisting his fellow convicts in a pact, to put an end to the killing, and eventually to capture a patrol ship. . . . Now it seemed like a school-girl's fancy. These men were savage animals; and the only rule was Kill Or Die.

A clever idea, this was, to let the condemned be their own executioners. It would appeal to the vicious dulwitted Patrol officers. Hayle remembered the pleasure the fat Patrol Captain with the old-fashioned eyeglasses had taken in watching the boys work him over, 'questioning' him.

Anger rose up again. There must be some way to break this cycle, to take this game away from the Patrol.

Hayle rested, then went back into the water to wash the mud from his hair, nostrils, mouth. He drank deep, then considered

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the next step. Before him the swamp stretched away, a treacherous tangle of trees, vines, sawgrass, apparently endless. Cautiously, he turned back to the forest. He had to find one man who would listen to reason. . . .

PATIENTLY, Troy Hayle watched beside the dark pool in the cave that was his den. In the orange light of the tiny fire he could dimly discern the sluggishly moving forms of small blind fish. One swam closer, and Hayle tensed; it moved away, and Hayle sighed, shifted his position. Food-gathering was a tiresome process—and, except for such tedious methods as this—a dangerous one.

Behind Hayle, an angry buzzing sounded. He turned, his hand on the half-finished knife he had begun to shape from the stump of the shortsword after it had snapped between the ribs of an ambusher. One of the giant dragon-flies, its darting shadow huge against the damp cave wall, circled erratically, struck against stone with a sharp clatter, veered, dived to the floor, fluttering. Abruptly, it was still. Hayle rose, crossed the narrow space, stirred the dead insect with a toe. He stooped, touched the glistening green body, then picked it up, carried it back to the firelight. With his knife, he opened the two-inch thorax. It split along the centerline. Bits of broken glass fell out, and a tiny gear. A maze of hair-fine wires filled the case. Hayle stared at the tiny machine. The eyes were two quarter-inch lenses.

Suddenly, Hayle understood. This was how the Patrol watched their prisoners, spying on every move. This was the reason that quick vengeance followed any attempt of the hag-ridden inmates to join forces, stop the insane killing decreed by the Patrol whenever two men met in Paradox. The hovering eyes, seeming to be no more than heedless insects—watching, transmitting every scene to Patrol HQ. And the victims, knowing only that fraternization was death—and that at any instant attack might come from any quarter—soon learned the rule of Kill or Die.

Exultation rose in Hayle. This was what he had been waiting for—one tiny bit of luck, one small advantage, to tip the scale against the Patrol by only a feather-weight. But a weight that a determined man could use to trigger an avalanche.

Fishing forgotten, Hayle reviewed again his plan. Not really a plan, he knew. Only a vague idea, a formulation of the situation in terms of a few imperatives. There were still so many links unclosed . . .

Paradox was a terraformed planetoid, once, long ago, a pleas-

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ure resort in the first days of expansion into space, when incredible fortunes were being made by a few bold adventures. The gravity and atmosphere generators buried at the tiny world's heart had been built to last an eon. Now, a century after the last of the great corporations had died of taxation, they functioned still. But the tropical gardens had long since run wild, the carefully pruned trees burgeoned into jungle, and here, in an isolation undreamed of by earlier ages, the ruthless Patrol dumped their victims.

Only one possibility existed for escape; the Patrol ship. Its capture was basic to any plan. One man alone could, conceivably, overcome the armed fourman crew. Separate them, ambush them one by one—

But here practical planning ended. With cooperation between prisoners, a concerted attack—. But somehow, the Patrol always knew. Hayle had seen them come twice in the four months of his imprisonment, to pounce, string up offenders by the heels, and blast off, leaving behind another page in the legend of terror that kept their victims obedient.

But now—their pretty scheme had developed a tiny flaw. Just one hairline crack in the gigantic masonry of Patrol dominance, an advantage his masters would not suspect. He had something to offer now as hope when next he held a knife at a man's throat and solicited his cooperation. And now another plan began to form . . .

TROY Hayle lay flat on a tiny platform of woven twigs, high in a tree near the clearing where months before his fire arrows had burned out the den of a sly killer. He looked out across steaming jungle, the black water of the swamp, the tiny island where his hidden den lay, and beyond to the wall of distant vegetation, almost over the curve of the miniature horizon.

A green dragon-fly passed overhead, darted back to hover, humming. Hayle carefully avoided looking directly at the device, pretended to scan the trails below as though in quest of a victim. The hovering eye moved on.

It was time to go now. The new man who had been delivered had been caught in the blast of the departing Patrol ship, and had lain screaming, broiled alive, for an hour before falling suddenly silent. Either he had died of burns, or one of the watchers had finished him off. In any case, the plan would have to wait again, for the next visit of the Patrol ship.

Hayle had seen five new arrivals since he had come to Paradox, and he was no farther along with his scheme than he had

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been months ago. It had been a long and bitter year. One leg was a little lame, the legacy of the wound he had taken on his first day. He was leaner, harder, practiced now with bow and spear and knife. He had learned to live on leathery turtle eggs, masses of minescule crustacea, stunted berries, and the strange blind fish from his pool. He had survived and grown wise in the ways of Paradox. But escape was no nearer. The new man was dead, another hope for a recruit lost. Hayle checked the special knife he had filed from the broken short-sword, and started down from his lofty platform. His new idea was still untried; he had ventured out into danger for nothing.

Hayle dropped from a low branch to the ground, moved off toward the water's edge. He would lie hidden near the ford until dark, then cross. It would be good to get back to his secure den, to rest and plan—

There was a dudden rustle of leaves, and Hayle froze—too late. A man crouched, startled momentarily at Hayle's soundless approach, then turned to reach for a hidden weapon. Hayle leaped, locked an arm around the man's throat, hurling him sideways to slam stunningly against the ground. In violent embrace, the two smashed through brush, rolling, twisting, Hayle fighting for the grip he needed. The other man was big, too big, Hayle thought with detached clarity. He glimpsed an Eye darting excitedly above. This was his chance, he realized. Now, if he could manage it.

He surged against the crushing grip of the other, groped for the special knife. He forced the lever over with his thumb, straining against the fingers at his threat, his face buried in the other's shoulder. He raised the knife, and struck hard . . .

The man jerked, and Hayle twisted, his mouth near the man's ear.

"It's a fake," he hissed. "Make it look good . . ."

The fingers at his throat probed, agonizingly. He had been a fool to take the chance. Blackness was closing in. He must forget the plan now, and fight for his life . . .

"I have the Patrol's secret . . ." he managed. The fingers pressed, unrelenting. Hayle knew he must strike again. He groped for the knife, still protruding from the back arched over him, the telescoping blade held in the skin only by a barbed quarter inch of blade. Painful, but hardly fatal, the doctored knife would seem to penetrate six inches into a living body, while barely drawing blood. A clever ruse to fool the Eyes. . . . But only if the victim were quick-witted—and

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unafraid. And now it had failed, and he must force the lever back, and strike again . . . if he could.

Suddenly the pressure was gone. The fingers buried in his throat relaxed. Hayle sucked in air, feeling the man go limp, sliding from him. Hayle scrambled aside, crouched. The man lay, face down, the knife standing in his back, pink blood in a tiny rivulet down his side. Hayle gripped the hilt, pulled. Six inches of blade seemed to emerge from the body. Hayle leaned close murmured, "You're doing fine."

He grasped the man's ankles, took a limp wrist in his left hand, and heaved. With the body over his shoulder, he moved off into the brush. A green dragon-fly followed. The Patrolmen watching would wonder, Hayle knew. But he had props ready in his cave. Burned human bones to toss outside. The Patrol had seen cannibalism before. They would believe it now, and the incident would be forgotten. But in the cave, the plan would go forward —with two plotters joined now in a team. Hayle's throat ached, but he hardly noticed; his luck was turning at last.

HAYLE stirred the fire, raked out the roasted tubers, and pushed one across to his guest.

"Not very tasty, but nourishing. How's the back feeling?"

"Sore," the other replied. "You were too damned realistic. How's your throat?"

"I'll live."

"By the way, my name is Griffin."

"Hayle." The two men shook hands, grinning.

"What was that you said about the Patrol's secret?" Griffin said.

Hayle brought out the remains of the shattered Eye. Griffin examined it.

"No wonder the damned bugs are always flitting around when there's any action," he said. "And this means we're safe here, in the cave."

"We can do what we like, as long as there's no Eye around. Now, let's talk plans."

"How long have you been here?" Griffin asked.

"About a year."

"I've been here three. I haven't worked out a plan yet; not one that really looks possible."

"So we'll have to try the impossible. Just getting together's a pretty good start."

"True," Griffin said. "But just a start. And a partial program's no good. I intend to succeed in getting out of this, and back to Earth to shed a little light on the activities of our glorious Patrol. We can't afford to make a mistake."

"This is no time for caution, Griffin. We need the ship. One of us will bait it in, the other will

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take on the job of hijacking it while the crew is out on the chase. I've got a knife, a spear, and a bow. We won't ever get a better chance. There's nothing to wait for."

Griffin looked at Hayle. He hesitated.

"Supposing we pulled off the miracle; what then? We knew nothing about the outside security arrangements; we need more time to study—"

"There's nothing to study. We take the ship and play it by ear, Griffin. Now, while we have our health. Tomorrow one of us might be killed—then the survivor would be back where he started. With the secret of the Eyes, we have one small advantage. Let's use it."

"Yes," Griffin said thoughtfully. "That bit of data makes a difference." He stood up. "You're right, there's no point in hesitation. I trusted you once and I'm still alive. I might as well go all the way. Come on; I'll introduce you to my partner."

HAYLE followed Griffin as he eased between a leaning slab and the veined wall of the fissure, to emerge in a low-ceilinged chamber. He gaped at the room and at the rough-hewn chairs, table, bunks, the stone and wood utensils before a fireplace where a small blaze crackled. A hearth of flat stones had been built out before a natural niche where the logs burned. On its edge a man sat, scratching at a square of hide stretched on a frame.

Half an hour later, with explanations and introductions completed, Hayle sat at the table across from the two men, a clay mug of hot 'tea' in his hand. Kregar, Griffin's partner, a grey-haired man of middle height with penetrating blue eyes, looked at him thoughtfully.

"How do you know you weren't seen?" he asked.

Griffin explained the secret of the Eyes. "We split up and looked innocent whenever one showed up. They didn't see us together."

"Let's get started on detailed planning, then," the grey-haired man said with decision. "With Hayle's information we're ready to move." He smiled ruefully. "All we need now is a plan of action."

"We'll have to take a ship away from the Patrol," Hayle said. "To do that, we have to draw them here. That's easy enough; we simply flaunt the killing rule, openly."

"Yes, that will work, of course," Kregar said, eagerly. "Two of us to be the quarry, the third to take the offensive. I've watched the ships landing on these punitive missions. A crew of four. Three disembark, armed with heat projectors or some type of automatic solid projectile

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weapons. Their job is, of course, to contact their target and carry out the usual business of stringing the victims up.

"One man is left on board the ship. His post is at the entry port; he carries a wide-field high-frequency stunner; I presume this is to enable him to disable any attacking force without fatal injury to any of his fellow Patrolmen who might be in range.

"Their landings are usually made at a point as near as possible to the position of the target, which they seem to know with uncanny accuracy. Your discovery of their Eyes explains that, Hayle."

"How can you be sure there is only one man aboard while the other three men are out after their man?" Hayle asked.

"They use a class L scout for these visits," Kregar said. "They carry a four man crew."

Kregar reached for the hide-covered frame he had been at work on when Hayle arrived in the cave. "I've worked out here the position of our emplacement," he said, placing the diagram on the table. "We have to assume that the ship will touch down at the most suitable point in the vicinity of its objective. If we bait them in at this point," he indicated a spot near the entrance to 'headquarters', marked on the stretched skin, "they'll have little choice but to bring it down here." He pointed to a tiny circle marked 'pool'.

Halfway up the slope, Hayle saw the boldly drawn X labelled 'Emplacement'. "Our bait moves off up-slope," Kregar continued. "His objective is of course to draw the Patrolmen as far as possible from the ship. In that we can count on only limited success. We'll have perhaps three minutes to do our work after we launch our attack. When the signal has been given by the 'bait' that he's been taken, we attack. Not a second before."

"Yes," Hayle said. "We'll need every possible moment to secure the ship before the patrol returns—and they'll come back in a hurry at the first sound we make."

"Right. The offensive party will advance as soon as the guard has been knocked over, enter the ship, and secure a hand weapon; possibly the sentry's stunner, if it is still intact. He will then cut down the returning patrol."

"What about the—bait, the two men who lead the Patrol away?"

"Since the usual practice is to suspend them from a tree as a display, uninjured so that they can make the maximum of noise for the longest possible time, they should be quite safe for the few minutes which will be required to get to them and cut them down."

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"That means leaving the ship unguarded," Hayle said.

"Unavoidable," Kregar replied.

"How about another man?" Hayle said.

"We can't risk it," Kregar said. "We had to have at least three, but we run the chance of losing a man if we attempt to enlist another; and we can manage with three."

"What about the offensive party?" Hayle said. "What does he attack with? The ship will be sitting in an open clearing, from the landing blast—and it will be plenty hot. We can't get close enough for a sure kill with a bow and arrow."

Kregar looked at Hayle, rubbed his hands together. That of course, is the crucial detail of our plan," he said. "But I think we'll have a surprise for them."

"Kregar is quite a chemist," Griffin put in, "as well as a strategist. He's found deposits of some very useful chemical substances and ores. We smelted metal in a wonderful natural furnace, farther back in the rock. Come on; I'll show you."

Hayle followed Griffin and Kregar to a box crudely made of split wood. Griffin squatted, pulling away the covering of dried grass. Hayle leaned over and saw a grey, blunt mass of cast iron, nearly three feet long, tapering from a rounded breech to a flaring muzzle. Two sets of heavy studs projected from the sides of the tube, for mounting. Beside it a row of heavy iron-grey balls nestled in the packing.

"The powder charges, wads, and fuses are here," Griffin said, indicating another box.

Hayle touched the coarse pitted surface. He had a sudden mental picture of spurting flame, the expression on the patrolman's face. . . .

"Our emplacement," Kregar said proudly, "will mount a five centimeter howitzer."

THE jungle was still as Troy Hayle lay concealed in deep grass, staring down across a sparsely grown stony slope to the flat ledge where a tiny pool threw back the sunlight. The trap had been set and baited; the next move was up to the Patrol.

Hayle, Kregar and Griffin had scouted the area at dawn, to insure that no other hunters lay in wait. The gun, packed over with clay and bark to resemble a section of log, had been hauled into position by Kregar. The Eyes had paid him no particular attention. The emplacement, built of heavy blocks of stone set in the ground and covered over, had been placed months before. Kregar had waited until he was unobserved, had then levered the clumsy weapon into position, alert for a warning hum, and covered it with a screen of twigs

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and leaves prepared in advance.

It had been two hours since Griffin and Kregar had walked into the open, pantomimed a cautious conversation, and moved off into the wooded area beyond the pool, paying no attention to a quickly gathering group of Eyes which hovered at tree-top level. Hayle hoped their pick-ups were as inefficient in resolving detail as he had surmised. Now, lying behind the gun, Hayle went over in his mind the plan of attack. He would wait for the arrival of the ship; then, quickly, lay the gun accurately on target. At the signal from Griffin, a single shout, he would touch the permatch to the fuse, firing the fifteen ounce iron ball. Without waiting to see the effect, he would immediately reload and prepare to fire again.

Hayle would wait until he saw that the sentry was disabled, then advance, secure the stunner if intact, and if not, enter the ship and arm himself. He would then man the entry and taking the returning Patrol by surprise, pick them off.

That was the plan, Hayle thought; and it could conceivably work. IF the Patrol responded as usual; IF the single guard stood in the open part; IF the cannon fired properly, and accurately; IF he himself were successful in finding a weapon, and then beating three-to-one odds. IF, Hayle went on relentlessly, the Eyes didn't spot the ambush; IF the cannon didn't blow up; IF no outsider interfered at a crucial moment . . .

Hayle shook his head angrily. He thought of the puffed face of the paunchy Patrolman who had delivered him here, his callous arrogance. He remembered the hairless thug with the old-fashioned spectacles who had stood with his hands in his hip pockets, watching indifferently as two beefy, sweating hoodlums twisted and prodded at him, expertly inflicting agony without wounds. A warm feeling of rage began to fill him. His legs ached to be up, his hands itched to smash a malevolent Patrol face. Perfect anger, he thought, driveth out fear . . .

It might be hours, perhaps many hours, before the ship arrived. He looked up, wishing it were here now. He drew a deep breath, relaxed. Better save the energy until it's needed.

A faint rumble sounded, at the edge of audibility. Hayle stiffened, cocked his head, listening. It was not imagination; it was getting louder.

Hayle looked up, among the glaring stars, unfiltered by the thin blanket of air, searching for a moving point. Then he saw it, far out to the east, moving in a great slow arc. The ship was here, so soon . . .

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He shrank against the earth, mouth dry, pulse thudding. This is it, he thought.

The light was brighter now than a star, blazing overhead, pulsing brilliantly, growing. The sound was a thunder, beating against the flattened grasses, the sun-seared slope. It was above, roaring like a maddened giant, the great white eye coruscating, glaring like a second sun. Fierce heat lashed at him; his eyes closed against the rush of searing air, the blast-whipped smoke. The thunder of the rocket filled the world, drowning even the howl of the heat-driven wind. He could only grip the earth, and hold his position. And then the sound was sheared by harsh silence.

A rain of scorched leaves patterned down, grit and tiny stones bounced from his back, smoke and dust boiled upward among whipping branches, smouldering leaves. Then ringing stillness, and the faint descending whine of pumps from inside the ship. Hayle spat dust from his mouth, cautiously wiped dirt from his eyes. A loud ping as hot metal contracted; muffled sounds; Hayle was close enough to the ship to see the space pits in the hull, the scars around the fueling ports. The ship had landed dead center on the spot marked on the map.

Hayle lay watching, relaxed now, ready. When the time came, he would act. He had his knife, made from the blunt shortsword the Patrol had contemptuously thrown to him. If he failed to find a weapon in the ship, he would at least return the gift before he died.

Hayle watched the port. It trembled, swung in. The black interior of the ship, a harsh voice, a movement; then a Patrolman ducked in the entry, hopped down, glancing at the surrounding forest, unslinging an elaborate light automatic rifle. He moved forward a step, turned to wait. There was a delay, more voices. Then the second man dropped down, tossed a cigarette on the ground, absently stomped it out with a booted toe, peering into the trees. A third was at his heels, pushing past him with a word. The first two men moved off down slope, the other angling away to their left. Excited green dragonflies hovered, darting.

A fourth man appeared at the port, scratching his chest. He looked around, spat deliberately, leaned against the port. That's perfect, Hayle thought. The permatch was in his hand. Wait for the signal—and don't miss . . .

A minute passed, two, three.

Far away beyond the pool, a shout floated back; the signal! Hayle tensed, and the lounging sentry straightened, squinted

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across the slope to his right, spat again—and stepped inside.

Hayle was conscious of his heart beating, pounding almost painfully. Sweat ran down his forehead; dust floated in the sunlit air. The precious seconds were running out, while down below beyond the ship Griffin and Kregar struggled in the hands of the Patrol. Now they were adjusting the ropes around their ankles; now they looped them over a high branch, hauling; now the men began their self-sacrificing agony, swinging, head down, hoping that a hundred-to-one miracle would save their lives, waiting for the crack of the gun.

Only a minute or two now until the three Patrolmen would reappear; Hayle fought an impulse to jump up, go in after the guard. It would be useless, he knew; he must stay with the plan. Why didn't the man reappear!

A shape moved beyond the port, and Hayle felt muscles tense; time seemed to stop. Then a small figure, grey clad, moved to the open port, looked down, turned and awkwardly reached with one foot for the step. A new prisoner—

Behind, the Patrolman, hat off, put a foot against the face of the other and shoved. The slight body fell backward with a thin cry, rolled over on the ground, rose hesitantly, and brushed back short hair in a feminine gesture. Hayle realized then, suddenly, that the new prisoner was a woman. The guard was in the entry. Now! Hayle struck the permatch—the Patrolman pulled at his half-open tunic, reaching up to lay a hand tenderly on his jaw, saying something to the girl. As she turned away, the sky split with a thunderous crack and the guard leaped sideways, arms and legs wide, seeming to hang for an instant posed against the tarnished metal surface of the stabilizing fin, then whipping over the top edge in a mad tumble of loose limbs, trailing redness, to slam the earth and rise in violent reversal, a tattered dummy glimpsed through clouded dust.

HAYLE was up, running; he leaped low bushes, rocks, not feeling the slash of broken stones, eyes on the open port.

He heard a scream, remote, meaningless. He could see the bulkhead inside the port now, dull green, a tiny red light glowing in a panel. With a leap he cleared the platform, scrambled into the silent gloom of the entry lock. He stared around him, spotted an arms rack, empty. The inner door stood ajar. Hayle knocked it aside, slammed a fist against the lift lever. The tiny platform slid smoothly up, uncovered an open exit, stopped. He sprang out, jerked open a locker

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door; charts. Another locker, another. Dirty shirts, a liquor bottle, bundled papers, magazines. He scooped the contents from a drawer, stepped across the papers and litter on the floor, tried a heavy box. Locked.

He couldn't stay any longer. He was back in the lift, dropping. He darted out, flattened against the wall, drew the knife, and waited. Outside he saw sunlight on trees, the stony slope. A loud voice called; he heard the pounding of running feet. Only one man. Hayle shrank back, arm down, the blade's point at the edge of the port. The platform creaked, and there was a scrape of boots, heavy breathing.

"Gronski," a wheezy voice called. A hand appeared on the edge of the port, and then a round face, bushy browed, red, was staring into Hayle's. The knife punched through cloth and flesh, grated on bone. The man jumped convulsively, and at the movement Hayle reached out, seized the collar of the Patrol tunic, yanked the collapsing weight inside.

He twisted the knife, freed it, pulled the heavy body back, jumped to the port. The other two were coming up now. They called, "Tull, Gronski . . ."

Hayle spoke without thinking, imitating the wheeze of the man he had knifed. "Yeah," he said. "Come on up."

"What's the monkey business . . ." The voice was a grunt as the platform shook again, and a tall man was standing with drawn hand blaster in the entry. This time Hayle struck with an upward slash, and the hilt of the knife was slippery with dark blood that welled, as the fellow stumbled back, disappeared, the knife jammed in a rib. Hayle whirled to the dead man on the floor, searched for a weapon. Nothing; it must have fallen outside.

A dancing violet light lit the entry, and cursing started, rose to a shout, stopped abruptly. There was a long silence.

"Hey," the man outside called. "You inside there." Hayle stood silent.

"A deal," came the voice. "Let me in; I'll turn you loose."

"Get up on the platform," Hayle said.

"Come on out."

"Come and get me."

There was a hum, and an Eye hovered at the entry. Hayle watched it. It darted away, came back, hung outside the port.

"Come on out of there, crumbum," called the Patrolman. "You got no knife now; you ain't got a chance."

"What was that you said about turning me loose?" Hayle called.

"Yeah, I'll set you down anywhere you want. Come out with the hands up."

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"You'll have to come in after me now," Hayle said. "That Eye picked up what you said. Your future in the goon squad won't be worth much unless you get me in a hurry."

"Lousy con," the fellow squawked. The platform vibrated, and then steadied. Hayle's stomach tightened to a hard knot.

"That's far enough," he said. I've got the port covered. Now tell me what you'll offer if I give up."

There was silence. Just one break now, Hayle thought . . .

The sound was a shattering roar, a hammer blow against the hull, a whining of ricochet mingled with a howl from the Patrolman. Hayle whirled onto the platform and jumped, stiffening his legs, to slam both heels against the head of the man crouched on the ground. Hayle twisted, grabbed for the throat; but there was no need; the neck was broken.

Hayle rose, panting, and saw the girl, up on the slope among the trees. A trail of smoke wound up from emplacement. She had seen the first shot, manned the gun—no time now to waste.

The knife! He turned to the slashed body, tugged at the knife. The girl was coming down the slope staring at him.

"Get in the ship," he called. He freed the knife, stooped to pick up a fallen blaster, ran toward the trees.

An Eye dropped toward him,

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and he raised the blaster, fired. The tiny machine exploded. He ran on, pushing toward the dense jungle that had been the bait's agreed destination. Always before, the Patrol had strung up the men it wanted to punish. But there was no certainty that they hadn't shot Griffin and Kregar instead.

Then Hayle pushed through a screen of high brush and saw the swinging figures, head down, twenty feet in the air, side by side. This was the danger spot. There would be killers watching . . . He stopped, set the blaster for continuous low fire, and stepped into the space beneath the tree. He aimed the blaster, blanketed the entire perimeter, then clambered into the tree.

"Kregar, Griffin; we made it," he said.

Griffin hung limp, mouth open, face purple. Blood oozed from under his closed eyelids. Kregar stirred, spoke. "Welcome back, Hayle," he said.

THE girl came up to stand at Hayle's side as he sat strapped in the pilot's seat, setting up the take-off sequence.

"Where you going to head, Mister?" she said.

"I don't know," Hayle said. "Anywhere; out of here."

"Listen," the girl said. "My name's Salinda Steele. I've been a prisoner of these pigs for two years. I know where their headquarters is, and it's a pushover. Head for that. You'll never get through the cordon anyway—"

"We're heading for Earth," Hayle said. "If we get through, there'll be time enough later to take care of the Patrol. Better get tied in."

"Listen to me," the girl said. I spent last night pouring drinks for three of the top Party leaders. This ship is the hottest thing they've got, and it's loaded for bear. And wait till I tell you . . ."

"Look," Hayle said, "we'll be doing all right if we can just get out of this spot."

"Let me finish," the girl put a hand on Hayle's arm. "I just want you to know the spotters. or Eyes as you call them, transmit to this ship. They hardly ever tune them in at base. So nobody saw. And get this—their base is right here on Paradox. It's not thirty miles from here, on the other side."

Hayle turned to the girl. "Here?"

"Yes; and there are absolutely no defenses. This ship is the only armed one between here and Station Seven, a week's run in-system."

"Griffin," Hayle called; "Kregar, did you hear what she said?"

"I heard," Griffin said weakly. He was conscious but very ill. Hanging head-down was tough

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on a big man, Hayle thought. "But it doesn't sound reasonable," Griffin went on. "Why would these scoundrels leave their base unguarded?"

"You don't understand how complacent these boys are," Salinda answered. "They've never met any opposition; they don't expect to. They have the whole system as their private playground. There's never been anyone to threaten them. They keep this bucket around for appearances, but even it's got a regular patrol to run. Nobody can get off Earth with anything carrying weapons, and nobody gets near here without being picked up anyway. But we're here, inside the defenses; and this boat packs a regular destroyer's firepower."

"What do you know about armaments, Miss?" Kregar asked. "How would you know what their defensive arrangements are?"

"Yeah," Salinda said. "I'm just a female; what would I know. . . . Well, I don't want to shock you fellas, but they didn't bring me out here to pour tea. I've spent a lot of time with these guys in the last two years; I've listened to them talk when they were drinking, feeling good. They talk around me like I was deaf, dumb, and blind."

"You were among them for some time, Miss Steele," Wasson said. "Why did they wait this long to consign you to Paradox?"

"I tried to knife a guy last night; he turned out to be a big shot. To me he was just another big ape with wandering hands. That was the last straw, I guess. They were always threatening to do something to me. They finally did it."

There was a short thoughtful silence. "Look," Hayle said, "suppose we did attack their base; the other Patrol ships would swarm all over us. We want to get back to Earth. We intend to break the Patrol, and with the information we have we can do it. We don't want to waste the chance, getting a little short-range revenge."

"The only way you'll make it is to take the Base first," Salinda said. "It can be captured, and you'd have a bunch of big wheel Patrol boys cold. Another thing; they don't know you have this tub; you can probably get the big transmitter intact, without any message going out to the rest of the fleet. You can send them off on a wild goose chase."

"This big transmitter," Kregar said. "Is that the official State Broadcast Station? The one that handles the propaganda broadcasts?"

"This is one of them," the girl said. "There are two."

Kregar looked at the others. "We have to have that station, gentlemen," he said. "We can put our story on the air from

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here. And Miss Steele's idea about dealing with the Patrol squadron one at a time seems like a good one. I say let's try it."

"The idea has its points," Hayle said. "What do you say, Griffin?

"It might work. I'd say it depends on how much Miss Steele knows about the landing routine, recognition signals, the lay-out of the Base, and so on."

The girl smiled. "Call me Lindy," she said. "I can tell you whatever you want to know. I've spent a few nights in the control center . . ."

PATROL vessel TMJ C-23, returning from a routine delivery of a condemned prisoner to Camp Paradox and the enforcement of exemplary discipline for a violation of Camp Regulation One, reported to Solar Center Tower, requesting permission to land. Kregar and the girl stood behind Hayle, listening. Griffin still lay in his accelleration couch.

There was a long pause during which a conversation in the background mingled with a crackle of static. Then a deep voice: "Whatta you wanna land for, C-23? You got trouble?"

"Autopilot's out again," Hayle wheezed, imitating Gronski.

"Ah, Cripes," the voice said in disgust. "OK, come on down." The voice went on, yelling off-mike. "Off your duffs, you GCA guys; we're bringin' this can back in. And get me that mechanisms wise-guy . . ."

"Slick", Salinda said. "GCA will get you down to atmosphere."

A quarter-hour of instrument reading, power adjustments, and tense conversation ensued. Then GCA reported 'releasing Control'. Hayle took over, lowered the ship gently to the blackened pad, cut power, and turned.

"OK, we're down," he said, in the echoing silence. "Are you sure they'll come out to the ship unarmed?"

"Sure," Lindy said. "There's only about eight guys in the station complement here. You'll get four of them coming out. Then we'll have to go in after the other four. The wheels over in Party Town know what hit them."

Kregar came up to report a ramp cart headed out from the sheds. "We'd better get the port open," he said. "We'll let them inside, then herd them into the chart room for safe keeping."

"Don't be a sucker," Lindy said coldly. "Burn the rats!"

"We'll try to take them alive," Hayle said. "They're just the hired hands."

"Yeah?" Lindy said. "The hired hands never treated me any better than the bosses did. They love their work. Don't get soft on them now."

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The cart swung around the ship, slid to a stop, and four men stepped off. The first clambered up onto the loading platform, stepped through the port and stopped dead, staring at Hayle.

"Back up, Mister," Hayle said in a voice that was carved in granite.

The man stepped back, mouth open. Kregar pushed him through the door to the chart-room. "No sound," he said.

The next man was on the platform, through the port, blinking in the gloom. "Where's—" he began.

"In there," Kregar said, motioning to the open door.

"What's goin' on here," the man barked. Hayle swung a fist, slammed the man against the steel wall, then hauled the limp body clear of the entrance as the last two men stood, gaping. One craned his neck, looking into the ship. The other stared at Hayle, then Kregar. "You guys are convicts," he said suddenly. He started to turn, and Hayle and Kregar fired simultaneously. The man who had turned slammed against the rail, spattering blood, then slid down. The last man crouched, wide-eyed.

"I'll do what you boys say," he bleated. "Don't kill me."

Kregar pulled the corpse inside, locked the chart-room door on the three captives.

"We'll wait about half-an-hour, I think," Kregar said. "That's time enough for the repairs they were supposed to make, isn't it, Troy?"

Hayle nodded. "I'll tell these birds to strip and toss the uniforms out," he said.

Lindy, dry-eyed and tough, looked across at the sheds. "No alarm," she said. "I don't think anybody noticed anything."

"How are you feeling, John," Hayle said, stepping back to where Griffin still lay, limp in the couch.

"I'm all right," Griffin said. "But I must tell you; I'm afraid I'm blind."

THE uniforms were a poor fit, Hayle thought, looking from his own seamburst outfit to Lindy's baggy one. "We won't fool anybody in these get-ups," he said.

"We'll be on the cart," Lindy said. "They won't be paying much attention. They'll see the colors, that's about all. We just go in and spring it on them. And don't let anybody make a break toward that TX."

"You're the expert, Lindy," Hayle said. "We might as well get going."

Lindy turned to Griffin. "Take care of yourself," she said.

The three dropped to the ground, stepped onto the cart, moved off, leaving Griffin aboard. Hayle watched the windows of

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the rambling operations building, trying to detect movement inside, gave up. Beyond the edge of the oversized port, built to accommodate large military vessels, buildings towered.

"That's the old Solar Rest Center, Linda said. "The big wheels have converted it into a bunch of private palaces for themselves. They've got everything in the world there. They live like kings."

The cart rolled in under an overhanging observation deck. Hayle stopped it ten feet from a door marked ENTRY 2-G. The three moved wordlessly to the door, opened it, walked in. At the far side of the broad room a dull-faced man looked up from papers before him, stared at them. Hayle walked toward him. He saw the man's eyes leave him, go to the others behind him. The fellow's eye's narrowed; he stood up.

"Who are you guys?" he said.

Hayle reached for his blaster, and the man moved like lightning. A glare lit the room as a blaster appeared from nowhere in his hand, firing. Hayle leaped sideways, raised his weapon, and fired. The man spun against a desk, dropped.

"Three to go," Lindy said. "Down here."

She pushed through a door behind the desk, and Hayle followed her down a dim corridor. She stopped at a door standing ajar.

"This is the dormitory," she whispered. "I'll hit the switch."

As the light flicked on, Hayle saw a man in the bunk directly before him, sleeping heavily. He stepped sideways, searching for the others. Two rows on empty double-deck bunks, neatly made; nothing else.

"Let's roll that guy out of there and lock him in the john," Lindy said.

Hayle stepped to the bunk, prodded the man. He snored, started to turn over. Hayle took his shoulder and heaved. The man hit the floor heavily, grunted, sat up blinking.

"Get going," Hayle said. "In there."

The man struggled to his feet, puffy-eyed, unshaven, naked.

"What's the beef," he muttered, backing away.

Hayle rammed the muzzle of the pistol against the man's ribs. "Move off," he said.

The man turned and walked round-shouldered to the door, looked back, stepped inside the tiled room. Hayle closed the door and shot the bolt.

A SCREAM sounded from behind him, and Hayle spun to see Lindy drop, felled by a blow from a heavy-set man. Hayle fired, knocking the newcomer back against the door. He

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shoved the blaster into his belt, ran to the girl. She lay, loosely sprawled. He knelt, took her hand, feeling for a pulse. There was a creak from the door, and Hayle turned, drawing the blaster. A Patrolman leaped through the door, aimed a kick that caught Hayle's gun hand, knocked the blaster flying. Hayle fell back, rolled, came to his feet as the man rushed him. A heavy fist caught him high on the cheek, rocked him. Automatically, he lashed out, felt a blow land solidly in his face in a blinding burst of stars. Half stunned, he back-pedalled, came up against a bunk, blinking his eyes, fighting away blackness. He saw a movement, ducked, heard the crash of a hand against the sideboard of the top bunk, swung his fist up in a desperate jab that sank into hard stomach muscles.

The fellow staggered against him, clutching, and Hayle uppercut him savagely, left, right, pushing him away. He stood loosely before Hayle, then folded to the floor. Hayle stood for a moment, breathing heavily, looking down at the man, then went to the girl. She stirred, moaning.

"OK, fella," a soft voice said. "Lift 'em."

Hayle turned slowly, raising his hands. A paunchy naked figure stood, gun in hand.

"I seen you looking at Doole, figurin' whether to kick his brains out now you had him down," the man said. "You passed it; for that I give you a break"

"You might as well shoot," Hayle said. "I'll never go back."

"You'll go back," the man said gently. "Right now, since we ain't got a cage here, I'm puttin' you in the tank aboard the bucket. Let's go."

"You forgot your pants," Hayle said.

"Thanks for remindin' me. Gimme yours."

"Come and get them."

The man stared at Hayle through half-closed eyes. "Doole's worth maybe one more crack like that one," he said. "Peel."

Hayle started slowly unbuttoning, stalling. Maybe Griffin would come around, turn the tables. Maybe Lindy would somehow divert the Patrolman's attention for an instant, make him look away . . .

Hayle tossed the tunic after the trousers and boots. The man stood steady as a rock, covering him. "All the way," he said. "A guy don't get such big ideas when he's raw."

The fellow dressed slowly, grunting as he pulled the garments on one-handed, his eyes never leaving Hayle. There was no sound from the man on the floor or from Lindy. Hayle

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glanced at her, saw her breathing regularly. Maybe she was faking, would jump the man from behind when they passed, give him an opening.

"Let's go." The man moved to Lindy, kicked her lightly on the thigh, watching her eyelids. He motioned Hayle through the door.

They passed down the hallway, pushed through the door into the office.

"Got Harry, huh?"

Hayle felt the sweat rolling down his face. He pushed the gate open, started across the room. Then they were past the door, in the harsh sunlight.

It was a long way across the ramp to the slender ship. Hayle felt numb, unfeeling. His face throbbed dully from the blows, cut knuckles stung, the hot pavement burned his feet. It didn't matter, Hayle thought. It was easier to just let it go. It was the desperate striving to cling to life that hurt. Dying was easy. He would wait until the last moment, until the next step would take him into the shadow of the ship, and then he would turn and make his last play.

Long shadows lay across the ground; another few minutes and the sun would set. Hayle looked at the dark sky, the blazing stars, the glint of light off the hull of the ship. Close, he thought. There stands the ship, and there are the stars; but we kill each other, here in the dust.

Only a few more steps now. The sun was hot on the side of Hayle's face. He would never see it set. He looked into the blackness beyond the open port—and thought suddenly of Griffin. His step faltered, then he went on, into the shadow.

"What are you going to do with my friends, Mister?" Hayle called loudly. "They're hurt pretty bad; maybe dead."

There was no answer. Hayle didn't care. His words had been for other ears. Now he was at the platform, swinging up on it, stepping through the port.

"Hold it there," said the Patrolman, softly. "Don't get too far ahead." The big man clambered awkwardly up behind Hayle, prodded him through the port. "Don't get any ideas about the arms rack," he said. "Just ease forward."

Hayle took two steps, stopped, turned around, hands high, looking past the guard. The other narrowed his eyes, stood blocking the narrow way.

"A little to the right, Griffin," Hayle said steadily.

"Don't try to play no games with me, con," the man growled. He moved toward Hayle. "Move on—"

"All right, Griffin," Hayle said. "Take him."

At the last instant, the patrol-

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man whirled, as the garish flare of Griffin's blaster lit the dim passage. With a grunt, he jumped back, slammed against the deck full length with a crash.

Hayle went limp. "We did it, Griffin," he croaked. "We did it."

YOU had me worried, Griffin," Kregar said.

"I'm tough enough," Griffin said. "Are you ready to make that broadcast?"

"Here, eat some soup first," Lindy said.

"We're set up now," Hayle said, but don't you think we ought to clean out the Party boys over in the fancy buildings first? We don't know exactly who we've got there."

"Don't worry," Lindy said. "All those names I gave you were here when I left, and they're still here; we've got their transportation. I didn't miss many."

"You named some of the top Party men, Lindy," Kregar said, "and the Patrol Chief, plus a lot of minor lights who may have come up since my time. I think we've bagged some sort of general gathering. The Gods were with us on this venture."

"I don't think we'll have anything to worry about from the wheels," Hayle put in. "With the launchers laid on the middle of their pleasure dome, they're under control . . . The blustering on the closed circuits was a bluff."

"Go ahead with your broadcast, Kregar," Griffin said. "I want to hear it, too."

Kregar nodded, threw a switch, looked steadily at the glass eye. He was seeing more than the blank lens, Hayle knew. He was seeing the faces of millions who would hear the words that would blast the Patrol from power, composing suitably dramatic words in which to tell the news.

"People of Earth," said Kregar. "I give you back your Universe!"

THE END

The 19th WORLD SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION, sponsored this year by the Seattle Science Fiction Club, will take place September 2, 3 & 4, 1961, at the recently completed Hyatt House. Robert A. Heinlein will be the Guest of Honor. Advance convention memberships are $2 per person, with an additional $1 registration fee to be collected at the Convention. Send inquiries to Seattle Science Fiction Club, Box 1365, Broadway Branch, Seattle 2, Washington.

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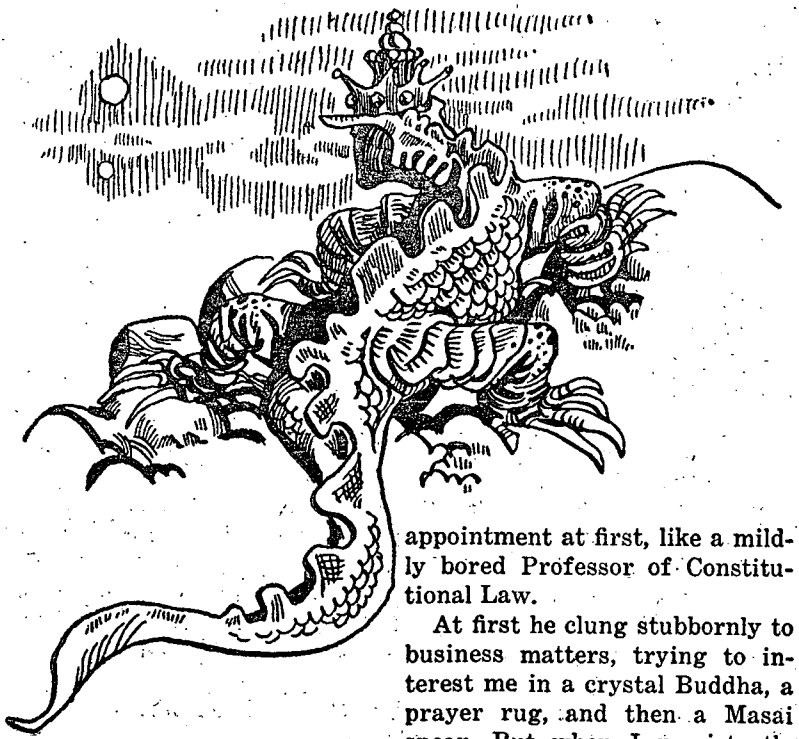
Memo From: ARTHUR PORGES

To: The Editors of FANTASTIC

Subject: REPORT on the MAGIC SHOP

MAGIC SHOP, or just Curiosity Shop—"Kleep's Curiosities," as the sign indicated? That was the question I pondered at the door of this obscure establishment just off Times Square. There was no clue that the neat, well-lighted store was any more than it claimed to be. As for the man himself, I found Kleep a disappointment at first, like a mildly bored Professor of Constitutional Law.



At first he clung stubbornly to business matters, trying to interest me in a crystal Buddha, a prayer rug, and then a Masai spear. But when I persistently

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returned to the attack Kleep finally began to weaken.

"Well, it might be amusing at that to discuss some of my specialties with you. A really sympathetic amateur is something of a treat. Normally we get unbalanced women who are desperately sincere, but intellectually pitiful.

"Now, I wonder—what would be of particular interest to a man like you. I have in stock at the moment good specimens of hoop-snakes, mermaids, unicorns, basilisks, sea-serpent eggs—" He paused, furrowing his brow.

"Phoenixes?" I suggested ironically, sure that he was amusing himself at my expense.

Kleep shook his head in disapproval. "Come," he said quite seriously, "you must know better than that. One cannot speak of the Phoenix in the plural; there's never more than one at a time." He sighed. "I no longer have it. When the last one burned itself, and arose from the ashes it took wing. So far, none of us has been able to locate, much less recapture the thing."

"You didn't mention ghosts, vampires, or ghouls."

"Most of us won't deal in malignant spirits. The Association frowns on it. A few people, like Redi, dabble, but he has no ethics at all."

"Then you have nothing traditionally supernatural."

"I didn't say that. I keep a few poltergeists for rental purposes. If you will excuse a chestnut of the Trade, here is one place where the question, 'How much do you charge to haunt a house?' makes good sense. But poltergeists are not usually dangerous. I rent them for use in old houses, where they merely fling things about. An active poltergeist can actually raise the rent twenty per cent in some countries—England, for example—where snobbery thrives on ancestral homes complete with ghosts."

"You mentioned the basilisk. Surely no such creature exists."

"On the contrary. It is one of the least rare of the so-called legendary beasts. You recall, perhaps, how a basilisk is born."

"The fable is," I said doubtfully, not too sure that I wasn't thinking of the chimera, "that it comes from a rooster's egg."

"That's right. In medieval times the production—rather occurrence—of basilisks was wholly dependent upon chance. With thousands of barnyards in Europe, an occasional abnormal cock was bound to appear. Given the exact circumstances and environment, some of them laid fertile eggs which hatched into basilisks. Nowadays, of course, we operate more scientifically."

I MUST have showed my bewilderment, because he added

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complacently: "We alter the odds. By a little simple surgery, plus female hormones, we provide a healthy cock with the necessary biological equipment for egg-laying. Tricky, but quite practicable. Usually the eggs are ordinary hens' eggs, and sterile as well, but in a certain percentage of the cases—far more than in medieval times—we find the typical soft-shelled, angular, basilisk egg."

"And then?"

"Oh, there are many possibilities. Some breeders prefer to let the cock hatch his own egg; that's traditional. I get excellent results with an ordinary incubator. Also, you don't lose any specimens that way. With a cock around, there's always the chance of his crowing; then it's goodbye to the expensive young basilisk. A cock's crow is fatal to a basilisk, remember."

"What sort of an animal is it?" I demanded. Not even Willy Ley had supplied information like this in his "Romantic Zoology series.

"It looks like a rather large chameleon, except for the more vivid coloring. The scales, too, are different: very small, thick, and tough. They will stop a rifle bullet at ten yards. Basilisks have a certain attitude, also, which sets them apart. I guess you'd call it an aristocratic air—arrogant, might be closer to the truth. The basilisk is a proud spirit, impossible to tame in any way. As Kipling might have put it—you know 'Bimi', that story about the ape?—the basilisk has too much ego in its cosmos. Besides, it's too dangerous for casual communication. One slip, and you'd be dead."

"Ah," I said. "You mean it's true about the sight of it, and the breath."

"Yes and no. Some of the stories are quite wrong. The mere sight of a basilisk is not fatal. It has to catch your eye with its own in order to destroy you."

"A sort of hypnotic effect?"

"Maybe. Nobody knows for sure, since there are no survivors once the process begins. For that reason, I inspect my specimens by closed circuit TV."

"What about the breath?"

"There I have more facts," he said complacently. "Most dealers have no interest in such things, but I have an inquiring mind. It's a pity I can't write a paper for 'Natural History,' but it just isn't done in the Trade. You see, I've really solved the problem of the basilisk's breath."

"That's very interesting," I complimented him. "I don't want to pry, but if it's not a special secret . . ."

"I can tell *you*," he said graciously. "It was easy to show, by routine chemical analysis, that the breath of a mature specimen

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consists of about seventy-three per cent hydrogen cyanide, twenty-five per cent arsine, and the rest very toxic organic particle poisons which, I suspect, are similar to the worst nerve gasses."

"And that breath is really deadly, then."

"Bad enough," Kleep replied. "Once I experimented with a healthy young goat. I blindfolded the animal so that the basilisk couldn't catch its eye. The basilisk knew, somehow, that the usual technique was out, and so used its secondary weapon. It blew a tremendous breath, a cloud the size of a watermelon, and perfectly aimed, right over the goat's muzzle. The goat dropped as if clubbed by a telephone pole. Didn't even twitch."

"Did it eat any of the body?"

"No, I've never seen a basilisk do more than take a sip of blood, and that seems to be a ritual rather than a matter of nourishment. I suspect that they absorb energy right from cosmic rays or something. Incidentally, I had to kill this one in order to remove the goat; the creature was in a frightful rage, and I didn't care to enter the room wearing a blindfold. They're too much like ferocious little dragons for that. Even with no special weapons, a big basilisk could mangle a man quickly."

"How did you kill it? You said the scales were too tough for bullets."

"I keep a hi fi recording of a cock's crow. An idea of my own. Works perfectly, and unlike a cock, performs on schedule only. Any other way would be slow and messy. They do have incredible vitality. Ah, I see you're wondering about my big cabinet."

I HAD indeed been stealing glances at a large box-like structure, obviously locked.

"My collection of historical rarities—so called 'lost items,'" he added proudly.

"Lost items?" I wondered how a lost item could be collected and still qualify. Kleep proceeded to enlighten me.

"Not really lost; not any more. But believed so, except among the Trade. For example, I have the logs of Columbus; the lost books of Livy; a letter from the sole survivor of the *Mary Celeste* (there's a story for you!); the missing pages of John Wilkes Booth's famous diary, which prove conclusively that Secretary of War, Stanton, was implicated in Lincoln's murder. And Gilbert and Sullivan's first operetta. Oh, and there's practically the whole edition of 'Poems by a Bostonian,' otherwise Poe's 'Tamerlane,' believed destroyed in a fire. I've left a few of these out, but nothing else. If the market isn't

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flooded, each copy will always be worth at least ten thousand dollars."

"Good Lord!" I gasped, after he had shown me a handful of the crudely bound little pamphlets. "Such things are priceless. You could get—"

"That's just the point," he interrupted me. "What could I get? Money? I have all I need. I would part with these only for other rarities of equal value. We are always dickering among ourselves that way. For example, I have offered this dragon's tooth of Cadmus, which has never been replanted, for a recording reputed to have been made of the voice of Queen Victoria. There is a play of Shakespeare's, known to have been buried with him, for which I'd give the exact location of the tomb of Archimedes, identifiable still by the carving of a sphere in a cylinder. A gifted friend of mine tells me the play is entitled 'Alexander the Great,' but although the manuscript appears well preserved, his arts cannot take him past the first page, which happens to be in plain view—to a seer—atop the remains. Unfortunately," Kleep added in a gloomy voice, "there is no way within the ethics of my profession to get that play. If Dr. Redi hears about it, I fear the tomb may be violated. All I know about the work, incidentally, are two lines quoted on the title page. My friend read them through the solid earth and rubble above the casket. They are probably by Shakespeare, but might be quoted by him instead; I can't be certain without studying the manuscript. Would you care to hear them? At the moment only a handful of my intimates can boast of knowing any unpublished lines of Shakespeare's." He didn't wait for my reply, but chanted sonorously:

I too could seize the giddy
world i' the throat,
Choke it convulsive black
to wilder reel.

"Apparently the reference is to Alexander. The thought, at least, seems consistent with a conqueror's point of view."

"It sounds rather like Shakespeare," I said cautiously, "and has the Elizabethan rant, but—"

"Exactly. 'But.' We'll never be sure, I'm afraid."

He looked so gloomy, I changed the subject.

TELL me," I suggested. "What is your favorite item here?"

He brightened at once.

"A real prize. I'm glad you asked. A recent acquisition, and one that has my rivals climbing the walls with envy."

He led me into the back of the store, and dragging me by main force past innumerable diversions, indicated a shapeless ob-

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ject swatched in canvas. It was as tall as I, and at least two feet wider. Kleep loosened a drawstring, and with deliberate showmanship, whipped away the whole covering at once. I took a deep breath and held it.

When I finally exhaled, my glance shifted from the grinning, gleaming thing with its fantastic teeth to Kleep, and then back. I stammered something in my astonishment.

Kleep seemed to purr at my reaction.

"Let me tell you about this," he said. "It's very interesting in several ways. Some months ago I heard of a Greek sailor who had been torpedoed in the last war. His life jacket was defective; there was a fog; and yet a miracle—literally—saved his life. This was somewhere off Sicily. He was about to go down for good, when just ahead of him a small island rose dripping from the sea. Volcanic action, probably. To make it brief, he spent the night on this lucky refuge, and in the morning discovered a deep cave containing enormous bones and this—my prize." He gave it an affectionate slap.

"There were temblors all day, and in the afternoon the island sank again, leaving the poor devil adrift once more. Fortunately an American patrol plane spotted him, and he was rescued.

"Now, we have ways of hearing about strange finds in the Trade. All of us realized the possible value of such bones. But the man, Nikolides, is an ignorant fellow with only the vaguest idea of the island's position. The problem was abandoned as insoluble—except by me."

I gaped at him.

"You are wondering, and rightly," Kleep exulted, which was something of an understatement, since I'd been doing nothing else for some time. "The difficulty I faced was this: how to get the approximate location—latitude and longitude—of a sunken island from an illiterate, near-moronic seaman. What would you have done?"

A wordless shake of the head was my reply.

"So they all reacted—even Redi. Yet it was simple. I had one of my friends explore the fellow's mind. We got him drunk first, which was the easy part of the job. Now you will object that we couldn't abstract from his childish mind knowledge that wasn't there—but we did exactly that. My own idea!"

"You did?" I mumbled, my fascinated gaze on something stuffed and irrational, half hidden in a dark corner.

"Only a centaur," Kleep said, turning towards it with a disdainful wave of his hand. "A poor specimen, anyhow. Now—my friend is a person of great

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competence—a top seer. Acting on my suggestion, he looked through Nikolides' eyes from inside the man's head, so to speak. He looked not at the island—such a description would have been useless—no, he studied the stars which this fellow had seen without conscious interest or understanding. It was an elementary exercise in astronomy to get the approximate latitude. The estimation of measures; angles, distances, weights, velocities—that is a basic technique of every first class magician. But longitude, you will say—what of that? No chronometer set to Greenwich time. Nothing. Oh, we were lucky, I don't deny it; but as Pasteur said, chance favors the prepared mind. If the fog had lasted—but it didn't, and there was a moon. A moon! An astronomer can determine longitude from the moon's place among the stars. It's not easy, but quite feasible. With the position correct to within a few seconds, I started a confidential search using trained divers, and this is the result." He pointed once more to the huge, quasi-human skull, the size of a wardrobe.

"THAT terrible wound in the forehead," I said. "The giant must have been killed by a blow from something pointed—a huge spear? It had to be a terrific blow to break such heavy bone."

"Come," Kleep replied impatiently. "You're not thinking. Remember the location—off Sicily. And the absence of eye-sockets. That is no wound at all. It once held an eye—a single eye."

I gulped.

"I see you understand, now. That is the skull of a Cyclops—perhaps the very one Ulysses blinded, although that can't be proved." His face darkened suddenly. "Great heavens—the time! I'm supposed to be at the farm to receive two unicorns and a moa chick from my agent. I'll have to run."

"You're joking about unicorns," I objected. "Surely they're mythical."

"Nonsense," Kleep said, a little brusquely. "There are dozens of them in secluded places of the Amazon Basin, and also in Africa. As you know," he went on, somewhat pompously, "the unicorn is easily captured by means of a virgin."

"But nobody ever sees a unicorn anywhere."

"I disagree. Most people just don't know where to look. Actually, they're increasing, like the buffalo. It's the virgins that are dying out! Which reminds me —" He switched on the light in a small store-room, and I glimpsed a shelf lined with more than a dozen gallon jugs, each full of flaky powder. Most of them held pinkish stuff, like talc, but a few

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were filled with darker matter: brown, yellow, and blue-black. Kleep took a jug of light-pink powder, and held it out to me.

"Here," he smiled. "I want you to have a little souvenir of our chat."

The jug was surprisingly heavy.

"What is it?" I demanded.

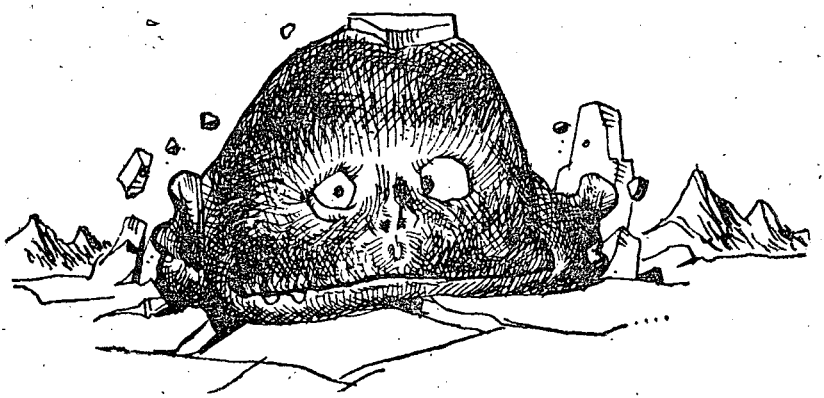
"A dehydrated girl," he said calmly. "A blonde, and if memory serves, a very exciting one."

"A dehydrated—!" I looked at the pink powder, shaking the jug in an idiotic fashion.

"When American soldiers brought dehydrated foods to Africa," Kleep explained, "there was a wedding of Western technology and Eastern magic. I haven't time to explain in detail, so listen carefully. Just pour that powder into a bathtub full of clean water. Let me see." He studied the Arabic label for a moment. "Yes, this girl was fairly tall: five, four. I should think you'd want her to weigh about —say, one twenty-five. Anything you like, within reason. Tastes vary. Now water weighs about sixty-two pounds per cubic foot, so if you add just two cubic feet —right? Not too hot; body temperature. Some prefer to add a dash of perfume, or even a harmless dye—nothing poisonous, mind. Making love to a bright green or pale blue girl can be rather amusing. And we mustn't forget this little vial of solution. To re-powder the girl, just inject one cubic centimeter of this, and put her in a warm, dry room for an hour. Be sure to scrape up all the powder, though or after a few sessions you'll have a lovely girl, but only a scale model, so to speak.

He ushered me out, turning to lock the door. A moment later he was climbing into a big station wagon.

"Sometime I'll show you the farm, where the big, live specimens are kept." And waving cheerily, he drove off. **THE END**



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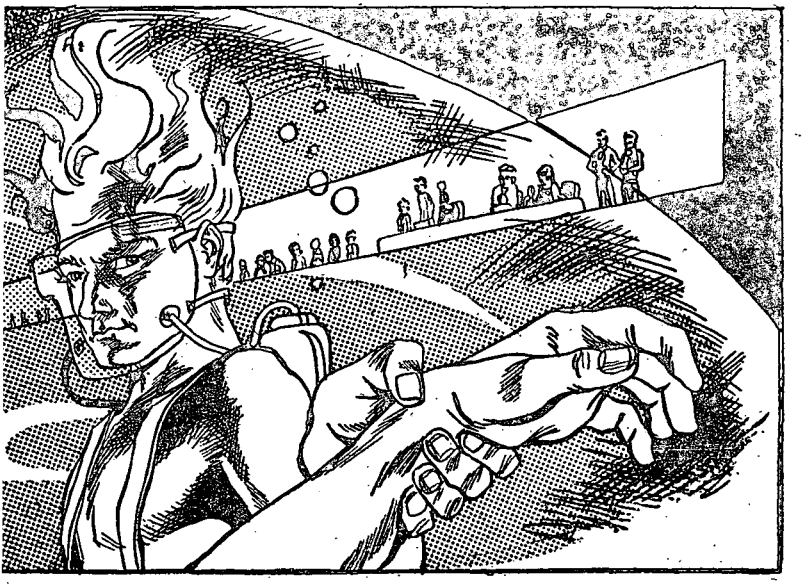
Passage to Malish

By THEODORE L. THOMAS

Power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely. But what happens when a man becomes so powerful that he can snuff off a galaxy as simply as swatting a fly?

THE three-minute alarm rang, and Jim Cooper walked to his acceleration couch. He strapped himself in and looked at his watch. A full minute before take-off to Malish. A fly buzzed past him, and then returned and sat on his knee. He loosened one hand, wondering to himself why the manifold marvels of science seemed unable to eliminate the common housefly throughout the galaxy. He swatted it, killed it, and tightened the straps and



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waited for the heavy hand of acceleration. It came.

When the force eased, he freed himself and walked to the salon and inspected the furnishings. You could learn a lot about a spaceship from the salon furnishings, and what he saw here was comforting. No gilding, no frills, no false walls or ceilings, no heavy picture frames, just the fittings needed for convenience and comfort. Good chairs and tables, lots to read, cards laid out, checkers, and chess, and chenters, a few viewers, a good film library. The Gafka Line was a good efficient line if Cooper's experience was sound, and it was. His month aboard the ship would not be too burdensome.

He stepped to the library and selected a book on the Flora and Fauna of Malish. Cooper knew what he wanted. There was very little anybody could teach him about anti-friction bearings; he had been selling them throughout the galaxy for ten years. And so he always made a point of learning as much as he could about the life on the next planet on his itinerary. A good salesman ought to know the customs and habits of his potential customers.

Cooper selected the best chair in the salon, and sat on it. Custom dictated that the chair selected on the first day remained the chosen chair for the balance of the voyage. Others came into the salon, looking quickly about to see the appointments and to find good chairs. These were the experienced travelers, and Cooper looked them over. Many were salesman like himself, galactic peddlars, out to solve somebody else's problems and to sell him some goods. That heavy-set one now, he must sell power equipment. There was something about a power equipment salesman that you could spot across the room, deep chested, and with a stomach that protruded even beyond the chest. Cooper had a theory that a man finally came to look like the products he sold—oh, not exactly like them, but like some characteristic of the product if you knew what to look for. A farm machinery salesman, now, always looked untidy and dusty. Cooper looked over the other passengers, and made up his mind that the trip would be a bad one.

TWO WEEKS later he had verified most of his original guesses. He also knew a great deal about the planet Malish. He was reading biographical sketches of some of Malish's outstanding citizens one afternoon when the lights in the salon went out. Cooper reacted instinctively. He found himself at the suit locker in the corner, even in the dark. The emergency lights came

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on, and Cooper stopped pulling on a suit long enough to toss several to nearby people sitting frozen in their chairs. The voice of the Captain came from a speaker. "Minor power failure, ladies and gentlemen. Put on the emergency suits; the practice will do you good. But we hope to have the mainpower on in a few moments."

Cooper completed donning the suit, although he felt there was no need. This Captain would not talk in such a manner if anything serious were wrong. Cooper helped some of the younger passengers, making light talk with them, steering their thoughts away from the fact that any failure of any kind whatsoever in deep space was not something to be laughed off.

Ten minutes later the main lights came on, and the Captain's voice said, "Well, we found it, and we think we know what caused it, but in the interests of safety we have decided to put in on the planet Mittobarb. This takes us a little out of the galactic lanes and will delay your arrival on Malish by about eight days. But it seems prudent. We recommend removal of the suits, unless some of you feel safer in them."

Cooper peeled off his suit without hesitation. He recognized competence when he saw it, and he had no fears for the safety of the ship. He was just finishing a book on Malishian Weather Cycles when the ship landed at Mittobarb.

In the port Cooper immediately began to arrange for alternate passage to Malish in accordance with the instructions of the ship's purser. Just as he stepped to the window of the ticket seller of the Carnnar Line, they ran out of space on all Malish-bound ships. He moved to a line in front of Krants Transportation and watched those ahead of him get their tickets, many of them to Malish. But then as he stepped up and stated his destination, he was told that all space was gone.

Cooper nodded and stepped back and stared at the smooth floor for no longer than ten seconds, pulling at his lower lip. Then he bought a paper and ordered a drink and sat down at a corner table at the bar and waited while he read. He did not wait long.

Somebody sat down at the other side of the table, but Cooper did not put down the newspaper and look at him. Instead Cooper said, "I don't know your name, mister, but I know you are a Knaolite, and you've certainly gone to a lot of trouble to collect yourself one little anti-friction bearing salesman." Then he put down the paper and looked at the man across the table. He was a

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Knaolite, all right. The bright black eyes, the high domed head, the thin silver hair, the larger-than-normal body, the slight hands, the calm manner. All the characteristics were there.

The Knaolite said, "They told me you were a reasonably intelligent man, and I see they were right. My name is Case, Arthur Case." He held out his hand.

Cooper silently shook it, and it became apparent he had no intention of saying anything. Case said, "I know how I would have come to the same conclusion. Do you mind telling me how you did?"

Cooper nodded. "I'm not a statistician, by any means, but I flatly don't believe in coincidences. One." He began ticking off numbers on his fingers. "A space ship makes a side-trip for an emergency landing. Unlikely these days, but still possible. Two, a line runs out of space as I step up. Unlikely, but possible, but by now I'm beginning to wonder. Three, a second line runs out of space as I step up. Now the coincidence is beyond all reason. The odds are very large. Alternative? Somebody wants me on Mittobarb, incredible as it may seem. Who? Why, no one else in this sector of space could have the ability to work out a thing like this except somebody from Knaol."

"Don't you believe in coincidence?"

"Never. A few times in my life I've been fooled, but most of the time when coincidences happen, somebody's pushing the odds. At least I've found that that is the way to bet."

Case smiled at him. "Interesting viewpoint, not so much for its accuracy as for its boldness."

Cooper felt no resentment. He said, "Have you considered that it might be accurate *for me?*"

Case raised his eyebrows and looked soberly at Cooper. Cooper realized he had surprised this man who was surprised at few things. Still, Cooper held his peace, waiting for Case to tell him why he was here. Case seemed to know what he was thinking.

"We need your help," Case said.

COOPER said nothing. There was nothing to be said when the most knowledgable and capable group in the galaxy confessed the need for help from a bearings salesman. There was a great deal here that did not meet the eye. So Cooper waited.

Case said, "Our data were not complete until after your ship left for Malish; that's why we did not get to you sooner. We went through all this nonsense here at the airport on the chance that some of our people might be able to spot anything less than a casual contact and become wor-

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ried." Cooper said nothing. "Your qualifications seem to be right, and let me clarify these qualifications. We need a man with good sense, a reasonable intelligence, no delusions or illusions, no need for a feeling of power, calm, and at peace with himself. You'd be surprised how rare a man like that is. We don't have any at all on Knaol. You're it, the best of the type we can find. See that?"

Cooper nodded.

"Will you help us?"

Cooper nodded.

"I don't know whether the job will be easy or tough. You could get killed, but I doubt it."

Cooper's mind raced. He trusted this man from Knaol—or any man from Knaol—and if Cooper were needed by the planet Knaol, why that was all there was to it. But what was happening? And as he asked himself the question he saw the answer.

The biggest news in the galaxy for the last month had been the brief contact with another race of intelligent beings. Out of the Magellanic Cloud, the Large Cloud, had come a different kind of being. It was said that very little headway had been made in establishing any kind of relationship with them. There had been some trouble.

Cooper said, "Does this have to do with the people from the Large Cloud?"

Case nodded affirmatively.

"Expecting trouble?"

Case said, "We don't know yet. We think our best chance of stopping any possible trouble will be to have somebody go visit them—say, a ball bearing salesman, like yourself—and if there is anything brewing, stop it."

"You have a surprising amount of confidence in my ability."

"Well, we will help you considerably. You will go through an operation we've worked out. You will be a very unusual man when we get finished. It'll take about six weeks to complete the operation, so I suggest we start if you are ready."

"Six weeks to recover from an operation?" asked Cooper.

The answer established all over again Cooper's reluctance to comment on events and things about which he had no knowledge. "Oh no," said Case. "There's no recovery period. The operation itself goes on continuously for six weeks."

COOPER'S room was comfortable. He settled down the first night on Knaol in a new dwelling unit used to house the men who were completing construction of the new hospital. In the morning, Case took him for a walk. The hospital was a five-story building covering an acre of land, but its size was still decep-

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tive. Most of it lay underground. Cooper and Case walked through the underground complex of heat pumps, mixing vats, control boards, chemical reactors and distillation columns, materials handling and storage facilities, control laboratories, and living quarters for the hospital crew. Upstairs the rooms were unlike the rooms Cooper had ever seen in any hospital. Most were rooms formed by banks of flexible tubes of a wide variety of colors; the tube banks were the walls.

Standing on the fourth floor, looking out across the countryside, Cooper could see the numerous auxiliary buildings surrounding the main hospital, all connected by large covered tubes to the main building. There must have been a hundred buildings. Cooper stared out and around at the giant installation, puzzled. Case had told him that the hospital was about ready, that only another day was needed to finish one small part. Yet there were no patients, nor any sign of any. And the hospital stood in an isolated area, deep in a tropical jungle on the equator of Knaol. Cooper considered these things, and an unwanted answer formed in his mind. He refused to let it develop. He said to Case, not looking at him, "Where are the patients?"

He felt Case's surprised look, and he heard Case say, "Didn't you know? You are the only patient. We built this so we could perform the surgical procedures I mentioned. Come along. I'll show you the operating room."

They went down to the first floor and passed through two sets of doors separated by a small room. Cooper recognized it as an air lock. They stepped into a huge room in the shape of a flattened sphere six stories high and two hundred feet along the long axis. Great control boards hung from the walls on extensible supports, and large colored transparent tubing laced back and forth everywhere. Dangling from the center of the ceiling, suspended in the center of the huge room was a transparent, ten-foot sphere from which emanated many bundles of power lines and transparent tubing. Case pointed to it. "That's where you'll be, resting comfortably in a bath of nutrient solution. In fact, this whole room will be filled with liquid. The surgeons themselves are immersed in the fluid, breathing through tubes—less tiring that way."

Cooper looked around. Now he could see how the entire hospital centered on this one room; everything fed to it or was controlled by it. For the first time he understood the magnitude of the project. He permitted himself to say, "It's not exactly the kind of set-up to remove a hangnail."

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Case ignored him, staring at the center sphere, rubbing his chin. Cooper heard him say, half to himself, "Only once before, a long time ago, has this been done. We don't even talk about it here on my planet."

Cooper had heard too, vague comments, whispy rumors, never spoken in earnest, of a man in the dim past, a man with strange powers and abilities, who helped set the galaxy aright at a time when trouble began to brew among the stars. Cooper wondered—was it a man who had been through this? Or was it all myth?

Case moved back through the lock and pointed to some of the laboratories that were closest to the operating theater. "They've been working there for a month," he said, "growing some cellular structures that are quite interesting."

Cooper nodded and said, "After my work is done, what happens."

"We operate again and make you as you are now, down to the last atom. You then go on about your business remembering anything that might have happened as if it had happened to someone else."

Cooper nodded and said, "Let's have lunch." And the two of them walked to the dining hall in an adjoining building. They walked around the outlying installations that afternoon, so Cooper did not see the liquid begin to flow into the operating theater. Cooper went to sleep that night, and he did not wake up the next morning. He did not wake up for six weeks, and when he did there was a brief moment when he thought it was merely the morning after he had gone to sleep.

But in the meantime:

HE WAS carried to the theater and placed in an adjoining room where a team of surgeons prepared him for submersion in the small sphere, the operation he was ready, equipped with external lungs, with all his normal breathing apparatus by-passed. When he had been checked out in the small sphere, the operation proper began.

The biological surgeons swam to him and began work with the hollow scapels through which flowed coagulents or nutrients, as the situation demanded. They began the tedious job of exploration, fixing the precise location of organs and parts of organs, for no two human bodies are the same. It took a day for the detailed mapping of this particular human body. The surgeons worked in relays. At no time were there less than eight surgeons directly at work on Cooper. Each surgeon worked for four hours, and then was relieved by

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a fresh man so he could go rest and recuperate. On four, off twelve the shifts went, but it was more tiresome than the hours indicated. Two hours before each surgeon was due to reenter the theater he had to seat himself in the communication room to bring himself up to date on what had happened since he had left.

The activity began to spread through the entire project. The chemists and biologists working with the solutions began to pick up the tempo as the first subtle changes in the solutions began to be made. On the fourth day the control laboratories handling the ingredients for the main solutions went on twenty-four hour shift duty. The flow of organs began.

Up from the growth rooms came the miniaturized hearts, six of them, any one of them having a vastly greater capacity than a human heart of normal size, each of them fabricated of polymeric tissue, the polymer having a silicon backbone. Each heart was carefully installed in a separate area around the peritoneal cavity; five spares seemed none too many. Each had its own circulatory system, independent yet interconnected with the rest.

A dozen kidneys, each the size of a pea, yet each of normal capacity, were placed. A series of livers, many spleens, four separate digestive systems, and dozens of minute living power sources were implanted around the center regions.

The operation was under the technical control of a board of surgeons who made the decisions and controlled the tempo and progress of the work. As each step was completed, it was the board who decided that it was proper to go on to the next. It was one of the chief responsibilities of the board to see that Cooper's individuality was never disoriented during the operation.

The organs were completed in two weeks, and the work turned to the nervous system. New teams of specialists began their work, and the members of the board changed, too. Here was the finest work of all, for the normal brain cells were replaced with cells of one-tenth the normal size, but hundreds of times the utility. The entire nervous system was rebuilt into a strong tough organization having alternate circuitry capable of standing up under loads never endured by a living creature. All of it was interwoven with a network of living semiconductors and tiny, pulsing transformers, capacitances and inductances. Storage cells, great batteries of them, were placed everywhere, in many instances serving double duty as insulating sheaths. In another three weeks the nervous system was complete.

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THE musculature went fast, since most of it involved installation of whole units. Commitment of the hospital installation had long since been total. Some eight thousand people worked around the clock to maintain the surgical procedures which never stopped moving at top speed in the theater. Literally tons of chemicals and pieces of equipment and tools and measuring and testing devices and glassware and steelware and plasticware flowed into the hospital every day, and all of it had to be coordinated to channel the individual flows to the places where they were needed. Distillation columns never stopped turning out the needed fractions of a hundred kinds of liquids. Reactors constantly performed their polymerizations, hydrolyses, amminolysis, alcoholysis, dehydration, and a dozen other unit operations. Control chemists grew hollow-eyed to insure the purity of the materials that flowed in great streams to the theater. Physicists lost weight as they verified the characteristics of the tiny living power packs and all the other living hardware that went into the theater. Biologists of twenty different specialities were everywhere.

The final week had to be devoted to reconstituting the skin and to growing the sensory apparatus. The flexible fluorosilicon isotactic material that formed the basis of the skin was very difficult to handle, even under the ideal conditions that existed in the theater. The fluid in the great room was no longer a clear, light-pink liquid. It was heavy brown in color, and the liquid in the little sphere was thick and hot and jet black. These conditions were the worst of all for the surgeons, for they could see only by short-wave radiation. Finally, the blood that was not really blood was introduced, and the operation was over.

Case looked down at Cooper as the surgeons washed him off. "When will he recover consciousness?" he asked.

"In the morning, about three hours from now."

"Is he right?"

"He's what we set out to do, if that's what you mean."

"Will he return to us so we can put him back the way he was?"

"I hope so. Oh, I hope so. A self-willed man with capabilities like this. . . ." The surgeon shook his head and sponged off a recalcitrant stain and stepped back and continued, "He's ready. We will take him back to his room, although it doesn't matter where he wakes up. You will be there, I guess?"

Case nodded. He was sitting alongside Cooper when he woke up.

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COOPER'S eyes opened, and there was the barest flash of panic at the strangeness, brought instantly under control by a total awareness of the situation. Yet that barest flash was too much for Case. The surge of power from Cooper toppled Case unconscious from his chair. Cooper mentally dipped into him and found the trouble and righted it and then helped him back into the chair. Then Cooper sat up and swung his legs off the bed and looked at Case, and said, "I see."

"Everything?"

Cooper nodded and stood up. "Everything you know, as well as everything known about the Magellians by Jarge and Hennder in the next building. Thank you for putting them there so I could learn from them. I will go now."

He went out to where the ship was, and put his hand on the sleek moly-steel side. It was a good ship, well equipped, but not overdone. He let his senses range through it. Ah, he chuckled. An oxide film coated one of the electrical jacks—poor connection. From where he stood with his hand on the side he tried to remove the oxide, but he could feel the control begin to slip away from him, and the traces of oxide in the metal crystals themselves began to migrate. He stopped and boarded the ship and went to the secondary control panel and pulled the jack and removed the oxide coat with his fingernail. He put it back thinking how remarkable it was that a ship could be readied and have so little wrong with it. These were good men on Knaol.

He took off using the jets, although he did not have to. Cooper wanted to do some practicing before he got too gay with his abilities. And there was some thinking to do, too. Out of Case's mind, and out of the minds of the two others, he had seen the concern about these people from the Large Magellanic Cloud. It was a concern based primarily on lack of knowledge; no understanding had yet been established between the two races.

For a moment Cooper dwelled on the shadow he had seen in Case's mind, a shadow of doubt about Cooper. It was a dangerous thing to provide a man with the facilities that had been provided Cooper. Despite the great care with which Cooper had been chosen, one never really knew where it all would lead. All his abilities and potentialities could be calculated. Yet there are times when the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, and this might be one of them. The men of Knaol could not be certain how it would work out. A moment of doubt passed over Cooper. In their place, he would take

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steps to make certain that a reconstituted Cooper could do no harm once his work was done. It occurred to him that he might have more trouble with his own people when this was over than with the Magellians, but he put the thought out of his mind, and turned to more productive thinking.

PUTTING his mind to his engines, Cooper began to feel out his abilities. In an hour his ship was travelling at better than a thousand times rated velocity, and in four days he arrived in the region of the Large Cloud. He quickly reviewed what he had learned from the minds of the two men, Jarge and Hennder, who knew as much as anyone about the Magellians. Cooper directed his ship toward what seemed one of the most important of the planets in the system. As he drew near, he reviewed his behavior, remembering that he was a bearing salesman, nothing more—unless it became necessary to protect himself.

At a distance of two planet diameters, Cooper's ship suddenly lurched, faltered, and then headed off on a new course toward the rim of the planet. Cooper swiftly checked for a malfunction, but there was none on the ship. For a moment he was stunned; there seemed no reason for the unaccountable behavior of the ship. Then he reached outside and groped blindly in the region in space surrounding the ship. There it was. A series of bands of magnetic flux reached up from the planet, terminating at the ship, some stronger than others, the relative strengths controlling the direction in which the ship was urged. It was clear as to what was happening: Maggellians on the planet below were somehow yanking the ship down to a place of their own choosing. "Well," thought Cooper to himself, "we might just as well establish right at the outset who is going to push who around in space."

He gathered himself. The best source of power were the beams themselves, and he swung through them a series of tiny conductive beams built from the power in the drive tanks of the ship. As the conductors sliced through the magnetic fields, Cooper drew the resulting current toward the bow of the ship and accumulated it there for several seconds. Using a part of the accumulated charge to lift half an inch of metal from the forward part of the ship, Cooper converted the metal to an ionized state, a plasma, and then drove a stream of it in the direction opposite that in which he wanted the ship to move. It was an ion drive of enormous power. The great beam stretched in a glow-

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ing arc across a hundred miles of sky, fanning out as it left the ship, pulled out of shape at its very origin by the power of the magnetic beams pulling at the ship from the ground.

The ship began to accelerate under the power of the plasma beam, but then it jarred to a halt. As the magnetic beams tightened, Cooper drew more power from them and accelerated his ions to ever greater speeds. The ship moved in jerky fashion, now faster now slower, but inexorably toward the rim of the planet. Sweat broke out on Cooper's forehead. He pulled harder, and threw out more conductors, some of them sweeping out well beyond the ship to pick up additional current from the interception of the planet's weak magnetic field. Frantically Cooper sought additional power. He found it in the heat of the planet as the ship drew near, but he couldn't handle it. He groped toward the sun, but couldn't reach it. He strained, and pulled, and his entire body was bathed in sweat from the effort, but he could not stop the fall of the ship.

WHEN, finally, it came to a heavy landing in the center of a large spaceport near one of the planetary poles, Cooper was exhausted. He was so tired he could hardly lift his arms. He sat motionless in the pilot's seat, breathing heavily, waiting for a pounding in his head to stop. It was a full minute before he recovered sufficient awareness to become alarmed. He had put out the best he had, and it had not been good enough. He had used every resource he could muster, and they had dragged him down willy nilly. The best that Milky Way science could put together had been ignominiously hauled out of the sky. Cooper grew afraid.

He ranged outside the ship while sitting in the pilot's chair. Nothing moved. He wondered if something was trained on him, ready to volatilize him and the ship. It was apparent to him that he could do nothing to stop it, not when they had the kind of power that had just been demonstrated. But it was not fitting that he sit here and wait for it, if that was what they had in store. Cooper got up and left the ship.

He stood outside on the ground, and then walked toward a pointed structure a mile away. Nothing moved as he walked, nothing showed itself. He walked in an unhurried manner, in long easy strides. Halfway there he saw a group of figures come out of an opening in the ground and begin to move toward him. He recognized the odd figures of Magellians. The stench of them reached his nostrils.

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They had the shape of a man. They walked on two limbs, but there were no joints. There was an erect torso, but it was uniformly cylindrical. They had two upper limbs, but they protruded from the center of the body rather than the upper section, and they, too, were jointless. They had a head, but no neck, and the nose consisted of slits located under the ears which were positioned at the sides of the heads at the normal site. There was a skin, but it was not smooth and taut as in a man; it hung in rows that looked as if they would flip in a wind. There was a mouth, but it was a vertical slit that ran from the lower jaw on up to a point between the eyes.

Knowing in advance what the Magellians looked like did little to ease the shock as Cooper walked closer. Their appearance was unrelated to anything in human experience, and Cooper's present facilities were of little aid to him in facing the situation. A certain toughness of mind and a resilience of viewpoint allowed him to stand his ground and give no outward indication of his inward turmoil. As he stood and stared at them, his composure returned to the extent that he appreciated what must be the discomfiture of the Magellians in facing him, he who was as totally alien to them as they were to him. He looked carefully for some indication of distaste on their part, but he could see none. He briefly wondered if their composure might be an indication of their superiority, and while so thinking, he mentally dipped into the nearest one.

IT WAS as if his mind had slipped into a deep black, fathomless pit, unrecognizable and featureless. He was unable to gather a single datum that was of any use to him. The mind of a Magellian was unreachable, unrecognizable, so totally outside of human experience that not the slightest meaningful contact could be made. Cooper began to feel helpless, and the panic began. But he brought it under control simply by recognizing that panic could not help him. One of the Magellians began to speak.

The vertical slit that was the mouth moved, and high-pitched, whining sounds issued. The skin on the face rippled and flowed in a series of complex patterns. Cooper was unable to understand it, but he knew what was happening. The spoken language of the Magellians was not formed by sound alone; facial expressions had to be read, too. Cooper shook his head and said, "I do not understand." The words had no effect on the whining sounds made by the Magellian. It took Cooper several minutes to realize that

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the head shake—that supposedly universal expression of negation—meant nothing here; the Magellian head apparently did not shake, or nod, or move at all. Cooper's problems were multiplying fast.

He began to walk toward the opening in the ground from which they had emerged. Instantly two of them hurled themselves at him. Almost without thought he drew on the heat in the ground and raised their internal temperatures to the point where part of the moisture in their bodies flashed into steam, and they fell over. He waited for the remaining ones to try to seize him, but they did not. Cooper again started toward the opening, and this time no one interfered.

He looked down the opening and saw a slanted plane leading down a tunnel lined with a brownish material. He looked at the Magellians gathered around him, and they stared silently back. Cooper said out loud, "Well, there's no getting around it. I've got to learn to talk to you before anything else. If we can't communicate, we'll always be at each others' throats, it if isn't too late already." Cooper glanced at the two bodies, still lying back where they had fallen. No one seemed concerned about them.

Several of the Magellians began making the whining sounds and causing the facial ripples. Cooper held up his hands in an effort to stop them. It had no effect—another gesture meaningful only to the culture that had spawned it. He raised his voice to shout them down, but only succeeded in shutting off most of the sounds they made while increasing the activity of the facial tissues. Cooper almost lost his temper; he began to gather power before he really knew what he was going to do with it. He released it overhead, raising the air temperature a few degrees. This the Magellians noticed, and it silenced them. They looked at Cooper, walking around him to see what was there. It was the first thing they had done so far that made any sense. Cooper started the laborous process of trying to learn the language by pointing to his chest and saying "Cooper". They seemed not to understand. He tried pointing to them and saying, "Magellian". No reaction. In five minutes time two of the Magellians drifted away, and three more joined the group. Cooper sensed heat at his back.

He turned quickly. A quarter of a mile back a Magellian stood with a cylindrical object in his hand, playing a stream of white fire over the two bodies on the ground. In a moment they were gone, and the Magellian walked away. The rest with Cooper took

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no notice. In fact, several more walked away to be replaced by still different ones.

ALARM began to build in Cooper. He now had some information on a few behavior characteristics of the Magellians, and out of these data nothing even slightly recognizable had emerged. Cooper was a highly intelligent man reinforced with extra computing abilities and logical facilities. His ability to grasp and solve a problem was extraordinary, far greater than that of any other man in the Milky Way system. What he saw here he did not like.

There was no sense continuing to try to communicate with the Magellians under these conditions. None of the original ones remained, and there was clearly nothing to be gained in running through the chest-beating phases again. He turned and walked toward the low pointed structure beyond the opening in the ground. A Magellian jumped on him, and he killed it and walked on, ignoring it. The remainder of the Magellians walked with him, paying no attention to the dead one. Cooper walked through the door-like opening into the building. Inside there were banks of equipment massed against all three walls, interconnected with four great spheres in the center of the building. Wide sheets of a metallic substance ran from the spheres to two large flat plates positioned near openings in the roof. The equipment was not familiar to Cooper, but he reasoned that it must be the power source that had pulled his ship down from space. He looked around, and he felt better when he saw what was going on.

Magellians swarmed over the equipment, many of them carrying parts to be inserted. As the replaced parts were passed down Cooper could see that many of them were charred or warped. As he looked more closely he could see that the symmetrical design of many portions of the massive equipment was marred by sagging casings and twisted conduits. They had pulled him out of the sky, but it had not been easy for them. They had almost failed. Cooper felt better.

He looked for a Magellian that had the appearance of being in charge, but there seemed to be no such person; each one did what had to be done without direction from anyone else. Cooper dipped into many of them, one after another, but he found nothing but the engorging blackness. He expanded his sensitivity to sweep the entire building, but detected nothing but the same featureless morasse.

Near the door-like opening a Magellian was busy replacing the bent needles in a series of

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dials. Cooper dipped into the blackness of the creature, and while maintaining the mental contact, stepped over and lifted a needle from the end of its arm-like appendage. The Magellian flung itself on him, and Cooper killed it, feeling the blackness collapse without change into nothingness. In awe Cooper looked down at the body; this creature had died with no detectable emotion—no pain, no fear, no regret. It died as casually as a man might scratch his head.

COOPER laid a hand on the face of the bank of instruments, and his senses raced through the metallic structure. Only part of it came through to him. Iron is iron, and its crystal structure remains recognizable throughout the galactic systems, but its arrangement into physical shapes and conformations was something else again. Again, a total failure to comprehend even the smallest part of this culture acted to bar his grasp of the meaning of most of the equipment or other expressions of the intellect. Cooper shook his head and walked out into the open to breathe the clean air. There, that was something they all had in common: they were all air-breathers. But that seemed to be the beginning and the end of it. These creatures were not interested in anything in the same way that human beings were. They had not bothered with Cooper's ship; it sat out on the field alone. Cooper stretched to it and checked it, and found it completely undisturbed. He looked around. He had to find a settlement, a city. Maybe there he could find some way to make intelligent contact. If he could find a manufacturing or producign center, he might be able to take up his role of a bearings salesman.

Cooper stretched far out, seeking gathering of large numbers of Magellians. At first he had trouble bending his sense beams to the large curvature of the planet, but he quickly found how to render them subject to gravitation. Thereafter, he had no difficulty. He chuckled to himself as he scanned. "Got a lot to learn yet about myself. Wonder if there's anything I can't do." He stopped chuckling, for he knew there was; he was unable to make any headway with these creatures.

There was a concentration of Magellians about one-quarter of the way around the planet, and it seemed to be the only concentration of the creatures there was. Cooper resolved to go there, but there remained the question of lifting his ship off the ground in opposition to the magnetic beams that had dragged him here. Coo-

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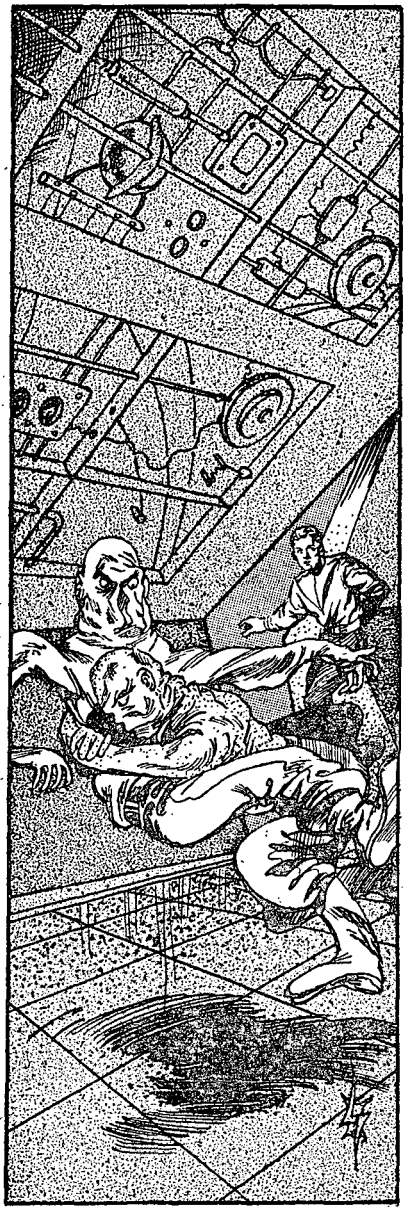

per reentered the building, just in time to see one Magellian fling itself on another. There was a brief struggle, and then one of them lay dead while the other got back to work. Cooper gruntled to himself. They apparently attacked one another with the same sudden ease that they attacked him. The great power in those sinuous upper limbs quickly snapped bone and cartilage in Magellian bodies; the fights were swiftly over.

Cooper placed a hand on the face of a panel, and followed the metal structure deep into the ground to a device that must be the power source. It seemed to Cooper to constitute a controlled fusion reaction, but he could not be certain; the minds that had built it were too different from his. But the shell was of steel, and the steel contained trace amounts of sulfur as an impurity. Cooper gathered large numbers of the sulfur molecules into one area, and introduced them into the crystalline structure of the steel shell to form a flaw in the shape of a square measuring two centimeters on a side. Then Cooper went to his ship, and raised it.

At an altitude of five miles he felt the touch of the magnetic beams on the hull of the ship, but only for an instant. He watched the boiling puddle of

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molten rock appear where the building had stood and spread over an area a mile in diameter. There was no explosion, only geysers of rock and a gentle licking of flames and climbing coils of heavy grey smoke. Cooper headed for the collection of Magellians he had found. He had covered less than five hundred kilometers when several Magellian ships joined him. He reached out to the ships and dipped into the occupants and found himself in the usual blackness. He had no warning at all when the orange electron beam danced from the third ship to the bow of his own. The bow was punctured before Cooper could strike an ionized beam of his own of predominately positively charged ions, and turn the electron beam back on the ship that had emitted it. The ship blew up, and Cooper shook his head. A human being would have resented the destruction of one of their fleet, and tried to do something about it. Not this race. And from what Cooper had seen on the ground, it was not a question of caution or fear. A Magellian seemed to strike out for some reason peculiarly his own, a reason not shared even by other Magellians.

Then a ship drifted closer to Cooper's ship. It was fortunate that Cooper was alert and ready for the unexpected. The purple beam that danced over was a neutron beam, unaffected by electromagnetic radiation or plasmas or ions of any charge. The beam tore a hole in the side of the ship but Cooper tapped the energy in the ship's reactor to amass nitrogen and oxygen right on the plate that was the source of the beam on the Magellian ship. The resulting scattered radiation tore out the side of the Magellian ship, and it plummeted to the ground. Immediately another ship pulled close and projected its own neutron beam. Cooper blew it out of the sky in the same manner. One after another the ships pulled close and went through the same procedure. It was the first time Cooper had seen the Magellians engage in any thing that resembled consistent activity, and he wondered. Could it be that they were curious as to how he handled the beam of neutrons? Cooper dipped into the remaining creatures, but he found nothing but the usual soft blackness. He withdrew and formed a heat sink, and when he had enough he melted the remaining ships. His own ship was riddled with holes. The absolute pressure in his ship was two millimeters of mercury, low enough to kill human being and Magellian alike, and Cooper resolved to repair his ship before the Magellians discovered that he could live under such conditions. Then he reconsidered,

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and one thing became clear. The Magellians—at least those he had met so far—were not the slightest bit interested in any human characteristics. To a human being, such lack of interest was unthinkable. But these were not human beings.

Cooper flew straight to the city and let his ship down in an open area just outside. He sat for a moment and sensed the entire region, dipping into all living creatures. He found nothing familiar, save the unfathomable blackness, so he got out and walked toward the center of the group of structures.

IT was a sort of city, all right, a city devoted to manufacture. Much of it contained buildings housing great flat pans of liquid in which grew a green scum. It took Cooper hours to find what became of the green material, for the process did not follow a logical sequence of steps as judged by human standards. The end product was a long thin, spaghetti-like, brown rod measuring half a centimeter in diameter. Cooper stood over a roll of it, looking at it, trying to figure it out. The smell that rose from it was vaguely similar to the stench that pervaded the entire planet. Cooper concluded that it must be a food. He set out to see it eaten. When he finally did, only his reinforced mental stamina kept him from being violently ill.

Cooper had assumed that the vertical cleft in the front of the head of the Magellians was used for eating as well as for uttering the whining sounds. His only basis for such an assumption was that human beings were constructed in that fashion. It was being born in on Cooper that the entire background of his entire race was totally useless in arriving at a single sensible conclusion regarding the Magellians. In order to eat, a Magellian tucked a long strip of the tube up under one of the flaps of skin that encircled its body, and apparently absorbed it by some process akin to osmosis. Sometimes one of the creatures would wind a strip round and round its body, from just under the neck to the region on the trunk where the legs branched. Often, when lifting the flap of skin to insert a fresh piece, the remnants of the last piece, moist and putrid, could be seen. Cooper looked further and noted that coils of the tube rested everywhere. Food was apparently supplied free.

In fact, Cooper was unable to find any evidence of an economy based on an exchange of the fruits of work. None seemed to be poorer or wealthier than any other. All seemed equal in rank, wealth, and ability. But Cooper now knew better than to try to

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judge them with human standards, so he wandered around. On several occasions a passing Magellian flung itself on him. He found that it was not necessary to kill the creature; he could merely immobilize it, and the killing urge passed after a few minutes; the creature then simply got up and went about its business. Cooper dared to wonder if somehow the constant killing served to keep the race strong by removing the weakest individuals. As he walked about the settlement, he saw enough fights to learn that every Magellian must be in a fight every so often. There could be no old or weak Magellians, only strong Magellians or dead Magellians. A human being could not survive for two hours in a settlement like this.

Toward dusk Cooper found the area reserved for the young. He circled in the region for hours in the relative darkness, and continued the next morning; it took him that long to find out what went on. A Magellian would wander in and deposit a mass of eggs in a huge water-filled container. Another would wander in and fertilize them, but it was all a haphazard process. The wrigglers from hatched eggs fended for themselves, and those who made it to a filled food tank had a chance to survive. As they grew they ranged further afield, and soon began eating the tube-like material that Magellians lived on. Any young that moved out of the area were killed. When the young were about half grown, the combat started, feebly at first, but quickly growing more vicious. Of those that reached half size, only half ever lived to emerge from the hatching area to take their places in the adult world.

COOPER needed two more pieces of innformation to complete in his own mind the analysis of the Magellian situation. He set out through the settlement, looking for the younger creatures. It was important to determine how they achieved their learning. The Magellians possessed a high degree of knowledge of the physical sciences, and so somewhere there must be the equivalent of a school. So Cooper searched, but found nothing. A full three days time he spent carefully going over the entire settlement, but there was nothing. He took more time to follow the progress of one of the young Magellians who wandered into the area where the solutions for growing the green scum were made up. He saw the young one start to busy itself at the outskirts of the activity. In half a day the young one was right in the midst of the bustling organization; apparently a full-

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fledged member of the technical team. Cooper was appalled at the speed of learning. There was no effort made on the part of any other creature to help it; it simply learned the complex tasks by being near them in some fashion that eluded Cooper. He did not concern himself with the learning process. It was there, it was efficient, it was swift. He need not understand it.

There was one other thing that Cooper needed to know. He walked out into the open and wondered if he had the right to do what he had in mind. He looked at the sky, and it was a strange sky that looked down on him. He looked around, and strangeness met his eyes, one that even his mind could not penetrate. The horrible stench filled his nostrils, and as he thought about it he felt no trace of repulsion at what he had in mind. He acted.

He walked toward his ship on the outskirts of the settlement. As the structures and the abundance of creatures thinned, he swept up one of the creatures, then another, and on until he had six of the Magellians immobilized. He carried them along in the air, using the heat from the ground around him as his source of power. He climbed into the ship, stashing the Magellians carefully in a corner so as not to hurt them; he wanted them alive, alert, and responsive. He reached out with a conducting beam and touched the sun, and adjusted it to draw on the proton supply.

HE lifted ship, but stopped at one kilometer altitude. The ship was still open from the holes in her hull, and he did not want the Magellians asphyxiated. No sooner had he stopped than he felt the touch of the traction beam they had used on his ship when he first came to the planet. Surprised, he traced it to a newly-built station, one that had not been there when he landed four days before. More skilled now, Copper tapped his proton supply and conducted a stream to his ship and then down the beam to the station where the beam was generated, and there at the tip of his conductor he brought about the fusion of hydrogen nucleii to form helium. He stirred his conductor over the surface of the ground, moving the point of fusion back and forth. Where the point of fusion hovered even momentarily, geysers of gaseous rock spouted skyward, and a borehole hundreds of meters deep appeared.

Cooper dragged his Magellians to the cabin window so they could see what was happening below. Making as certain as he could that their eyes saw, Cooper wiped his point of fusion in an ever-narrowing helix across the entire

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settlement. The Magellians watched it disappear in a flaming display of white fire and spouting smoke. Cooper released all hold on his Magellians to see what they would do. They did nothing. He dipped into each in turn and met the blackness. Cooper swept his point of fusion over larger regions of the planets, broadening it, and moving the ship out of the giant clouds of steam and smoke that began to reach it. His Magellians made no response. One turned away, then turned back. Another began to look around the ship. A third flung himself on a fourth in the customary manner. As far as Cooper could tell, the spectacle of their seething mother planet had not the slightest effect on any of them. He dropped them all out and rode his beam halfway to the sun.

Pulling great surges of power, Cooper sped his ship toward the nearest likeliest sun, not bothering to repair the holes in the ship. The sun was a late F-type star, and Cooper did not have to go near it to feel the blackness that met his probe. He turned to another star, and another until he had touched enough of them to tell with statistical certainty that life everywhere was the same. There was much to do.

COOPER headed back to the Milky Way, and to Knaol. He sent ahead a message that he was coming, and they met him. Case looked at the ship and shook his head and said, "Why did you bother with the ship at all?"

Cooper said, "To impress you, I suppose." And he smiled.

They waited.

Cooper said, "There is no way I know of that human beings will ever be able to communicate with Magellians. We can never learn to speak to them; they use a combination of sound and facial movements. There is no writing we can ever use, no signals, no way we can even let them know we want to communicate with them. It would be like trying to teach a flower to speak. They have no interest in us as living beings."

They stared at him, and he continued, "I am unable to tell you anything significant about them or their culture; they are too different for us to understand in the slightest. They have no curiosity as we know it, no love of home, children, or family, no desire to help each other, no need for money or possessions, no love of nation, race, or planet. I think we will never be able to find out what motivates them. There is absolutely no area in which we have a trace of anything in common with them. At the same time, they are technically advanced, physically strong, and

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will unquestionably kill men whenever they meet them in the same manner as they kill each other."

They looked at each other, and Case said, "What do we do about it?"

"You know the answer. Quarantine. Human beings must stay away from the Magellanic Clouds. Never go near them. And if they should ever come to the Milky Way, they must be killed immediately. The distance is great enough between the galaxies that a war is unthinkable, at least for now. These two races must have no contact. They cannot possibly live together."

They were quiet, then Case said, "Is that really the only answer, to so treat another intelligent creature?"

Cooper tapped the heat in the ground, so that their feet grew cold, and he dipped into each man's mind, and he created there a running series of vivid scenes of much of the behavior of the Magellians. When it was over, the men were white and weak and terribly shaken; Cooper had forgotten the relative softness of the normal human mind.

WHEN they recovered Case said, "You've done well, and we'll have to do it the way you describe." He hesitated, and Cooper knew without dipping into his mind just what he was thinking. Case said, "Well, you're work is done. We will put you back the way you were. Are you ready for the operation?"

"No."

They stared at him soberly. Cooper said, "Think of how nice it will be for me. No more persuading people they need antifriction bearings, then finding the minerals, building the mines and the factories, overseeing the distribution, getting the economy geared to use my product. If I stay the way I am, I can take it easy for the rest on my life."

They stared at him.

"There isn't anything you can do about it. Those of you who are here are not aware of it, but when I was changed there was a certain weakness built into the medulla oblongata. In case I refused to be changed back one of your people has a device that will cause a breakdown of the weak area."

They looked at each other.

"But I found that area, and I repaired it. It is not weak any longer. Your device is useless."

Case said, "Come on, Cooper, let's get the operation over with."

Cooper smiled at him, and turned to the others and said, "I want to warn you. Be very careful about doing this to a man. You can't really control him, and he can be dangerous. I could take apart your entire solar system in

(Continued on page 130)

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POLICEMAN'S LOT

By HENRY SLESAR

Illustrator SUMMERS

The Cops had everything: facts, figures, witnesses, identification. The only thing that they didn't have was an explanation.

SAM,

You put this letter in the Dexter file, I'll stomp you. The official police report is attached, that ought to be good enough for the Safe and Loft records. This is strictly for your eyes, and when you're through with it, I'd appreciate it if you'd light one of those damn kitchen matches you carry and burn it up. I got eight years to go before retirement, and I don't want any headshrinker booting me out of the department before I get my pension.

As you'll see in my report, Saul Dexter is dead. I'll let the coroner decide why and how he died, but I don't think he'll know any more than I do. Anyway, here's how it went.

On Tuesday morning, October 11, me and Marino left San Diego after agreeing to meet Lt. Kleper in L.A. Kleper's witnesses turned out to be a living pimple named Graham Jones, and his giggly girlfriend, Irma Patterson, both around sixteen. They claimed positive identification of Saul Dexter as the man they saw crawling out of the Bruton Company's window on the night of the robbery. Naked, did I mention that? Naked.

Kleper obliged us by showing us the Bruton safe, and Marino confirmed their own opinion that it wasn't a rip, punch, chop, or burn job, which left us with either a Jimmy Valentine or an inside accomplice. Kleper had already screened the employees

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and reported negative; Bruton himself was the only one who knew the combination or ever got near the safe. By the way, it wasn't twenty grand that was taken, it was only nine. The question was—how? Rule out insurance. Bruton didn't carry a theft policy.

It came down to this, from the facts we had. On October 2nd, at one o'clock in the morning, a naked man walked into the office of the Bruton Stationery Company, luckily found the safe open, took the cash, and crawled out a ground-floor window. Unfortunately, a couple of

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kids were walking by after a blanket party and saw him with the meat in his mouth. Incidentally, I checked the temperature reading for that night. It was 64 degrees.

As you already know, Saul Dexter came into the picture when he deposited eight grand in the National City Bank, and the serial numbers matched the bills stolen from Bruton's safe. Kleper ran a quiet check on Dexter and learned that he was originally from San Diego, and his only police rap was the Indecent Exposure we caught him on last April.

Two and two still make four, and a naked safecracker isn't the nuttiest character in the record book. So Dexter was put in the lineup, and the two witnesses said yes, that's the man. Don't ask me how they recognized him with his clothes on.

When Marino and I arrived, Dexter was out on bail. You know how Marino is; he considers himself the best safe man on the force, and the riddle was driving him nuts. How could Dexter have cracked that safe without even scratching its surface? I told Marino what I thought: that either he found it open, or knew the combination, and that's all there was to it. But you know Marino. If there's a new technique around, he wants to know it.

So we went to see Dexter. I don't know if you remember much about him, Sam, but you'll probably recall that he was a statistician for a small San Diego insurance company, unmarried and unoffensive and except for a pair of unpleasantly bulging eyes, not the type that sticks in your mind. He was living in a duplex apartment in Westwood, and it was pretty fancy. Modern, with a twisty staircase from one floor to the next. Expensive. That didn't surprise me; if Dexter was pulling safe jobs averaging nine grand a night, he could afford it.

But something else did surprise me. It was his height. Am I crazy, Sam (don't answer that) or do we have Saul Dexter classified at around five feet eight? That's what I remembered from his first appearance in our precinct. But the Saul Dexter we went to see was six feet three. Easy.

Well, if Marino was expecting professional courtesies from our man, he was mistaken. Dexter just glared at us with those bulgy eyes and referred us to his lawyer. I think Marino was all set to clout him one, just to learn his trade secrets, but I restrained him. Dexter didn't have to talk to us, after all; the only time he appeared slightly pleasant was when Marino, hot-tem-

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pered, referred to his Indecent Exposure rap. Dexter chuckled at that, like it was a great joke.

At any rate, you know the outcome. When the day came to turn himself in, he didn't show. That morning, Kleper despatched a couple of plainclothesmen to pick him up, and me and Marino went along for the ride. We got to Dexter's apartment and found the door locked and bolted from the inside. There was no other access to the street; the apartment was on the fifth floor. Kleper pounded on the door and told Dexter to come out; there wasn't any answer. Kleper warned him again, and then gave the orders for a forced entry. The plainclothesmen did an efficient job of taking the door off its hinges, and came in with guns drawn. Marino spotted Dexter first, and me second. What I saw made me sick. Anyplace else, a body in Dexter's condition might have been easier to take. But here, in this nice posh living room in Southern California, it was a nightmare. His naked body was demolished. His head was crushed like a dropped egg. Every bone was shattered. His flesh was pulp. Maybe a trip-hammer could have done so much damage, or a steamroller. But Dexter was in a locked and bolted room, lying at the foot of his twisty modern staircase without a sign of a nearby weapon bigger than a driftwood lamp.

After the initial shock, we got down to theorizing. Kleper immediately came up with the idea that Dexter had been killed elsewhere, and his body brought back to the apartment in its unholy condition. This meant some pretty tricky work with the doors and windows, both, as noted, secured from within. We ran the standard tests on the locks, and they were clean. A second theory, that he had been beaten to death, was quickly discarded. Where was his assailant? And how could he have done it? I mean, there's only one word for it, Sam. Dexter was *splattered.*

But I know how Dexter cracked that safe, and maybe I even know how he died.

Because there's one thing I never told you, or Marino, or Lt. Kleper. After our first visit to Dexter's apartment, I went back again, the very next night. I went there because Dexter invited me to come. He telephoned me at the hotel when Marino was out picking up a present for his wife at Bullock's. Dexter wanted the visit to be a secret between the two of us, so I told Marino that I had a date that night. You should have seen him looking at my gray hairs.

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I showed up at the duplex at eight o'clock, and found Saul Dexter in one of those shiny smoking jackets. He was in high spirits; I don't mean just drunk. He was in a good mood. He wanted an audience. He picked me.

The first thing he said was:

"Lieutenant, I'm going to do you a favor. I'm going to tell you the truth about myself. I'm not worried about you're using it against me, for two reasons." Then he laughed.

I said, "What two reasons?"

"The first," Dexter said, "is that nobody would ever believe you. All you have to do is report what I tell you, and you'd probably have to kiss your career goodbye. You *do* think of police work as a career, don't you?"

"Why, it's just a hobby with me," I said. "I'm really an oil millionaire from Texas."

"And the second reason," Dexter went on, "is that you won't be able to imprison me, whether my guilt is proved or not. You see, Lieutenant, I intend to disappear."

"You mean you're jumping bail?"

"That's part of what I mean."

"Well," I smiled, "that's up to you, Mr Dexter. And it's up to us to catch you again and lock you up. Right now, you're not convicted of any crime; you run away, you're a criminal."

"I didn't say run away, Lieutenant. I said—disappear." And that was so funny he had to laugh until tears ran out of his bulgy eyes.

And then he told me the story. Near as I can remember, these are his exact words.

* * *

One morning last March, I woke up and found my right hand enlarged to almost one third again its normal size.

I was alarmed, naturally, and called the office to say that I would not be in. I went to a neighborhood doctor; I had no regular physician, I've always been a healthy man. He examined me, but seemed uncertain of the cause of this strange affliction. The hand wasn't swollen, the skin firm, not puffy; it was merely larger. I told him that I used my hand a great deal in my work, and he offered the theory that the enlargement had been a gradual process of which I had not been aware until that day. I tried to accept this diagnosis, but it was difficult. A week later, I could no longer wear the shoes in my wardrobe.

Eventually, I entered a hospital for a two-week period of tests and observation. It was a frustrating episode in my life, a disturbance in the calm order which I have strived for years to

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maintain. The final decision of the experts was that I was suffering a disturbance of the pituitary gland, but they were unable to locate its cause. I began receiving a series of injections, and within two months, my hands and feet were normal in size once more.

One night, I had a dream in which I appeared taller than I am, considerably taller. It wasn't an extraordinary dream; I have always been on the short side, and don't they say that dreams are often wish-fulfillment? However, the dream became extraordinary when I awoke. I was six feet six inches high the next morning, my legs dangling well over the edge of my bed.

My first reaction was fright; I couldn't be sure where this strange growth process might end. I earnestly wished it had never happened, and no sooner had I made the wish than I found myself restored to normal size.

Do you understand what I am telling you? No sooner than the wish, came the reality. By the sheer effort of will, I had been able to reduce my size by ten inches. Why, I can't pretend to explain. Perhaps it was my original ailment; perhaps it was the effect of the injections upon my system. Whatever it was, I had within me the same magic potion that Alice found in the White Rabbit's tunnel.

I was not overjoyed by the discovery of my peculiar talent; far from it. I was unnerved, almost hysterical, full of fear and trembling. It took me a week to recover myself, a week in which I was tormented with the concern that some unwitting thought would slip by me, and I would find myself a monster. Have you ever tried to control your thoughts, tried to rein every impulse, every swift-moving notion in your brain? Try it sometime, Lieutenant. Try *not* to think of something, and get a taste of the horror I experienced.

Finally, I managed to get a grip on myself. Then I was ready for some calm experimentation. I stripped naked, and stood in front of the bathroom mirror. I wished that I could grow six inches. Instantly, the top of my head was out of sight in the mirror. I measured my height with a ruler; it wasn't a precise six inches, but close enough. Then I wished myself back to normal. Again, the miracle occurred.

Then I was bolder. I wished myself ten feet high. My head thudded against the low ceiling of the bathroom and I was knocked senseless. Stupid! Of course. I was hardly being rational at the time. When I awoke, I found my-

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self restored to my customary five feet eight, and knew then that unconsciousness, whether through injury or sleep, would always restore me to normal size whether I wished it or not. But I had learned one lesson, and had a painful bump on the head to remind me of it.

My next experiment was even more daring. I wished myself smaller.

How many adults know what the world appears like to a three-foot midget? I know, Lieutenant, because I tried it. I remained three feet high for almost an hour that day, before I ventured to will myself even smaller, to test the limits of my new power. I became one inch high.

The human race has made wonderful experiences, but I will match the thrills of your astronauts and Everest-climbers and deep-sea divers; and their moments of glory will seem trifling. To see the world in the perspectives I have seen it in is a triumph, a wonder, of unbelievable magnitude. I saw a table leg, tall and thick as a redwood tree. I crossed the vast, bright-colored plain of a cotton rug, and no jungle explorer knew the dangers of an uncertain terrain as I knew it then. I faced a giant ant, and looked into its bulbous eyes and was stabbed by a terror as primitive as any felt by prehistoric man; needless to say, I instantly wished myself larger, to escape its dreadful mandibles. It was enough for one day; now I rested.

A few days later, I felt a burning curiosity to know the limits of my growth potential; the problem was how to demonstrate it. In my apartment—I was living on Rivers Street in San Diego then, in a small, two-room flat—my limit was the height of the ceiling. In the street, I could not dare display my talent. Even in the open fields, I could not chance an unseen spectator. For if I had overcome my fear of experimentation, Lieutenant, it had been replaced with a new anxiety—the fear of discovery. I knew that if my powers were openly displayed, I would be the subject of curiosity, revulsion, medical and scientific probing, even anger. I have always been a quiet man; the thought of becoming a public freak was reprehensible.

At last, I determined the method. I would go out to sea, where all size is relative only to the vast ocean, and a ship may appear to a spectator on shore as an ocean liner or a child's model. I rented a small craft—I have always been something of a boating enthusiast—and headed for the outer Santa Barbara Channel. Only when I was well past San Clemente Island did I make my experiment, hanging over the

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side of my boat. I wished myself to be twenty feet high.

To this day, I am surprised and grateful that I managed to survive that experiment. The small craft I had rented shrunk to a toy beneath my gargantuan hands, and was almost capsized by the tremendous weight of my body. I began to sink, as if pulled beneath the waves by some terrible undertow; I found it difficult to breathe, even to move. I was defying gravity with my monstrous size, and gravity, with relentless force, was punishing me. I knew then that I would never wish to be a giant again.

It was a wise decision. Giants are the weaklings on this planet of ours; it was the dinasour's own size that defeated it at last. The earth is conquered by small things, by molecules and atoms; tiny, mysterious, devious. And so I resolved to confine my adventures to the world of the infinitely small.

Do you know *how* small, Lieutenant? Please don't ask me to demonstrate; I will not do that, not even to corroborate my story. You will have evidence enough, and soon enough. But I will not now give you the testimony of your own eyes to make you insist upon belief in others. No, I would rather they doubt you, Lieutenant, call you "overworked" or "irrational" or even "crazy." For this is what will happen if you tell my story, rest assured.

But how small? Listen. A month ago, in this very room in which we sit, I willed myself to the size of a molecule. I found myself transported to a great canyon, with sloping sides rising hundreds of feet over my head. There was an eerie cotton-like vegetation everywhere, and now and then, I would see some silent alien monster, with hairy legs and a bifurcated body crawling about, more alarmed than I to find me in its kingdom. I didn't remain there long, Lieutenant, I take no chances with these creatures of the microscopic realm. I returned to my normal size, and looked again at the incredible country from which I had returned. You may see it yourself, Lieutenant, at your very feet. Yes, this wooden floor.

By this time, as you may imagine, the ordinary aspects of living seemed unimportant to me. I had failed to report for work for almost a month, and when inquiry was made at my home, I answered it rudely. My dismissal notice came in the mail the next day, with a severance check for three hundred dollars. Three hundred! I have been employed by this firm for almost sixteen years, Lieutenant. Do you blame me for feeling vengeful?

It wasn't even a matter for

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deliberation. I hurried down to the office late that afternoon and saw my immediate superior, an insignificant man named Durkin who had previously, for some reason, been an object of respect and fear. Durkin was appalled by the change in me—I have changed, Lieutenant, my talent has changed me—and ordered me from the premises. I pretended to obey. Actually, I entered the supply room, stripped off my clothing, and willed myself to invisible size. When the office was closed for the night, I resumed my normal size and made a holocaust of Durkin's office. It was a petty, childish sort of revenge, I admit. But then a thought occurred to me, a way in which I would receive a greater and more deserving reward for my years of faithful service. I would rob the company.

The only source of cash that I had definite knowledge of was in the payroll office. Its door was locked, but it was no problem to reduce myself to microscopic size, and simply walk beneath the space between door and doorsill. The safe was another problem. I could undoubtedly become small enough to penetrate its iron door, but the idea of entering the dark, airless interior was frightening. At last, I conquered my doubts and entered. Then came the most alarming and difficult moment of all: to will myself just large enough to manuever the lock from the interior. It took a great and painful effort of will, but I managed it. My tiny fingers fumbled in the darkness until I located the lock's mechanism; at last, I succeeded in releasing it, and pushed the door open from the inside.

There was fourteen thousand dollars in that safe, Lieutenant; perhaps you recall the robbery. The firm's payroll master was accused of negligence in leaving the safe open, and the crime blamed upon some building employee.

I was so excited by my success that I began planning other such ventures. Some were handled carelessly; one day, I was forced to leave the premises of a bank without either money or clothes; it was that day I found myself arrested for the crime of Indecent Exposure. I look back upon that day only with amusement. Of course, I could have escaped the clutches of the police readily, if I so wished. But the crime, after all, was a petty one. I wished to preserve my place in society, until such a time when I would be ready to adopt a new identity, and a new life. But first, I needed money.

The Burton robbery was unfortunate. Not only was the amount of money less than I had anticipated, but the sudden ap-

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pearance of those young lovers was unexpected. In order to gain access to the office, I had been compelled to leave my clothing outside; I was seen just as I emerged from the ground floor window. Yes, Lieutenant, this is a free confession of the crime, but I'm afraid it won't do you much good.

But you're wondering now about my last statement. About my disappearance. Yes, I intend to escape you. I shall not return to your jail, Lieutenant, or your ponderous justice. When you come looking for me again, I shall not be here. You may search forever, but you will not find me. I will be a molecule beneath your feet, or a mote of cinder on an eastbound train, or a grain of sand on a sunny beach, or a speck of dust on an ocean liner. Don't try and find me, Lieutenant, I give you fair warning. You will have never encountered so frustrating, and so fruitless, a search . . .

* * *

All right, Sam, get out the kitchen match. This is about all I have to tell you about our friend Saul Dexter. You don't have to believe his story; I didn't when I walked out of his apartment.

Two days later, when Dexter failed to show, we went after him, and found him in the condition I've already described. No cinder, no grain of sand, no speck of dust; just a bloody, pulverized splatter on the floor.

Sam, don't tell anybody my theory. It's strictly for you and me, and I intend to forget it just as soon as Dexter's remains are put underground.

But you know what I think happened? I think maybe we showed up at Dexter's place sooner than he expected. He'd already bolted and locked the door and windows, but he became alarmed when he heard us breaking in.

So he willed himself smaller. He willed himself to molecule size, while he was still coming down the staircase from the upper floor of his duplex. And then he tripped. That's all that happened, Sam. He tripped on the bottom step and fell.

I know it's only five inches off the floor. But to a man a fraction of an inch in size, it must have seemed like a thousand feet or more. He fell off a cliff, that's what Saul Dexter did, and died a terrible death that restored him to his normal size.

That's what I think, Sam. Match, please.

THE END

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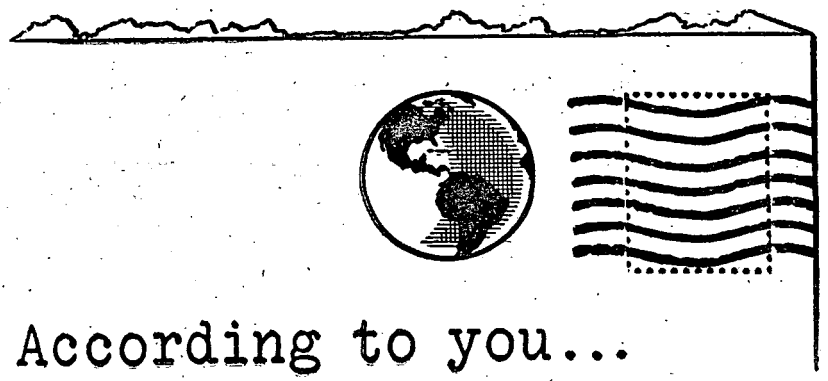

According to you...

Dear Editor:

Just finished reading the May FANTASTIC, and would like to say it is one of the best issues you have put out in the past year. The cover was magnificent; in my opinion, the best by far since Nuetzell's "World Timer" cover last Aug. While on the subject of covers, I would like to commend you on using an illustration on the back cover. Altho it was good, I would rather have an illo different from one already in the mag. It would make for more variety.

Give us MORE reprints of Howard. "Garden of Fear" was the first story by him that I have read. It was also the best story in the ish.

Altho I am a sf fan rather than one of fantasy, I especially enjoyed Fritz Leiber's "Scylla's Daughter." It is only the second of the Fafhrd and Gray Mouser tales that I have (the other being "When the Sea-King's Away" a year ago) and I hope that they will appear more often in the future.

Sharkey's novelet was most amusing, but the other short stories were very poor, especially Bunch's effort. I enjoyed his "tin-men" stories a little more than his more recent attempts.

I would like to echo Lenny Kaye's plea for a longer lettercolumn; you could have had three good long ones in the space wasted on "Lubrication." Also, I would like to repeat a suggestion that I made to AMAZING. That is, since you do not seem to want a full length fan-column, why not review a couple fanzines per ish, and stick them at the end of a story when you have a little space left over. True, this would throw out some of your art, but from what I gather from

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A.T.Y.; the fen wouldn't mind it, because they seem to want the reviews more than those designs; at least they mention the former more. The non-fans shouldn't mind, because this wouldn't take away from the fiction content. (This is if you will not start a full length fancolumn; I would still rather see one of those.)

Re: Mr. Wright in Ap. *A.T.Y.*: I went back and looked over the letters he was referring to, and I must say, that I found Mr. Padgett's letters more interesting than this. I say print constructive criticism about the mag, and leave out ones that are purely gripe. They have their place, but not in a lettercolumn, especially one as short as *A.T.Y.*

A couple of suggestions: since you are coming up to your 10th Anniversary soon (next Summer, I think), maybe you could have Sam Moskowitz do an article on the history of FANTASIC. (I didn't get the one I was hoping for in the April AMAZING, on the history of that mag.) Also, if you have a reprint ish, like the above mentioned AMAZING, I hope you will feature one of the *Conan* stories, since I have had my curiosity aroused by Howard's short in this ish.

Finally, I am awaiting the appearance of the June ish with more than usual anxiety. This is because James White and Eric Frank Russell are two of my favorite writers. Are the British writers trading markets with their American counterparts? In a recent ish of NEW WORLDS, the American authors outnumbered the native British.

Bill Bowers
3271 Shelbart Rd.
Barberton, Ohio

● *Either British writers are becoming more aggressive or just more industrious, but we are, happily, using a great deal more material from them—and hoping you like it.*

Some comments on the May issue, reprints and Fritz Leiber:

Dear Editor:

Congratulations on your policy to give us classic reprints, which strikes me so favorably that I must write in to make a request: "Lochinvar Lodge", by C. B. Clason from the March 1926 WEIRD TALES, my all time favorite. And congratulations too on the revival of good old Fafhrd and the Mouser. And that was a mighty fine cover that

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accompanied the tale and showed off the magazine. Otherwise, the Howard was a minor gem, the *Arrogant Vampire* was cute, the Lubrication Problem was little ado about nothing, and the time travel attempt was too lacking in logic to have much interest. But a Fafhrd & Mouser story raises any issue to brilliance.

F. C. MacKnight
612 Winterberry Rd
Monroeville, Pa.

Dear Editor:

Your decision to inaugurate a reprint series in FANTASTIC meets with my strongest disapproval, even though Robert E. Howard's "Garden of Fear" was a worthy selection. In any case whatever harsh criticism I might have leveled at the May FANTASTIC evaporates forgotten between synapses on the way to my typing fingers as I contemplate the brand-new Fafhrd-Gray Mouser novelet, "Scylla's Daughter," by Fritz Leiber.

I've followed the adventures of Fafhrd and the Mouser for more than twenty years, and I hope I can follow them for twenty more. Though the stories have changed quite a lot over the years, they move with the same zest and vitality that struck my fancy in the very first published story, "Two Sought Adventure," UNKNOWN, August 1939.

The spectral mood that cast a spine-tingling spell over the early stories such as "The Bleak Shore" and "The Howling Tower" has largely dissipated, and crogglingly enough Mr. Leiber has replaced this effect, in part, with an unexpected but very welcome measure of humor. In his new book, "The Delights of Detection" (Criterion, 1961), Jacques Barzun declares that the "true tone" of the greatest detective stories "springs from the alliance of murder and mirth." I wonder if Leiber's glorious yarn doesn't indicate that the same strange partnership may enhance the fantasy-adventure yarn as well?

My thanks to you and to Mr. Leiber—still one of my favorite writers—for an evening of first-rate entertainment.

Redd Boggs
2209 Highland Place N. E.
Minneapolis 21, Minnesota

● *All of which prompts us to ask—how about a book publisher looking into a new collection of Fafhrd-Mouser tales?*

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Dear Editor:

Allow me to congratulate you on the fine job you did in the May issue of FANTASTIC. All of the stories were well written and were able to catch and hold the reader's interest. I especially compliment you for printing Leiber's "Scylla's Daughter" for I have always enjoyed the genre of swashbuckle fantasy ever since I began to read the stories of R. E. Howard. I hope that you will continue to print stories about the Gray Mouser and Fafhrd, for they are an enchanting pair.

I also compliment you for printing the old Howard story (although I was already familiar with it). If you can keep choosing high grade fantasy stories, I believe this fantasy reprint deal will be a success.

I also enjoyed Porge's short vampire tale (which monster has always endeared itself to me). It was well explained without disregarding the supernatural element.

All in all, the May issue reminds me of the old UNKNOWN.

John Pocsik
7428 East Gregory Circle
Kansas City 33, Missouri

● *Good news for all fantasy reprint fans. We have some wonderful, long, old stories lined up—and we have another Howard.*

Dear Editor:

Ever since you inherited AMAZING and FANTASTIC (the editorial seat, that is), the quality of the mags has gone up. Since I know you want it to keep rising, there are a few things that you should take heed of.

Maybe I'll be hated by various and other sundry fans, but here goes. Sf fans are not faithful to their magazines! Oh, sure, they collect back issues of the mags from the 30's and 40's and rave about how great they were, but how many buy every issue of today's mags? Quite a few, I imagine, but not enough to make that much of a difference in the sales of the mag. Fans are faithful to the magazine that gave them their start in fandom, but only buy occasional copies of the others. Why, you ask? I'll tell you why! They're too interested in pubbing their own fanzines! The readers who don't belong to fandom are the ones you should concentrate on. Those and the ones who don't care too much for fanzines yet. Start a fanzine review, something on the order of Madle's "Inside Science Fiction," or anything that will get the newcomer *interested* in sf.

Just being interested in the fiction content of a magazine isn't

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enough. The stories will eventually turn up in some anthology anyway. If they don't, that means they weren't good enough to read anyway. However, if you have a mag that stirs up interest in a new reader and makes him want to write letters, get fanzines, etc., he'll always remember your mag as the place that gave him his start in fandom and continue to read your magazine through good times and bad, possibly even subscribing to it, even after he's forgotten the mags that only print fiction.

I know many of the fans would prefer an all fiction mag, but there are only so many fans and vast numbers of casual readers who are potential fans, but will never become them because they never heard of a fanzine or only have a vague idea of what one is like.

Lawrence Crilly
951 Anna Street
Elizabeth, New Jersey

● *I'm confused, pal. You say, let's review fanzines to get new readers interested in becoming sf fans. You also say sf fans don't buy magazines because they're too wrapped up in their own fanzines. Which came first, the pterodactyl or the egg?*

Dear Editor:

It seems that the Valigursky cover on the April 1959 issue of your sister mag, AMAZING bears a striking resemblance to the Emsh cover on the April 1954 issue of FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION. Plagiarism?

Now to my opinion of the June FANTASTIC: "Second Ending"—so far, so good; "Cosmic Relic"—started out well but fizzled off; "Face in the Mask"—very good, let's have more by Miss/Mrs. Fyre; "One Bad Habit"—so-so; "I. Q."—fair (for Reynolds); "A Small Miracle of Fishhooks and Straight Pins"—for the first time since I started reading FANTASTIC, I enjoyed a Bunch story! What can this mean?

David Charles Paskow
817 West 66th Avenue
Philadelphia 26, Pa.

● *Not plagiarism. Lots of sf covers look alike with all those rockets and gantries. The good writers and artists don't steal anyway. Delighted you liked the Bunch story. We figured that if we kept on publishing them, somebody sooner or later would agree with us that he has something in his stories!*

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PASSAGE TO MALISH

(continued from page 113)

the next ten seconds and your device is powerless to do anything to stop me."

Case tapped him on the shoulder as he turned away saying, "Come on, Cooper. We don't put our trust in devices. We put our trust in men."

When he said that, Cooper knew the human race would forgive him when it found that there were no Magellians in existence any more.

THE three-minute alarm rang, and Jim Cooper walked to his acceleration couch. He strapped himself in and looked at his watch. A full minute before takeoff to Malish. A fly buzzed past him, then returned and sat on his knee. He loosened one hand, wondering to himself why the manifold marvels of science seemed unable to eliminate the common housefly throughout the galaxy. He shooed it away, and tightened the straps and waited for the heavy hand of acceleration. It came.

THE END

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"Knox opened his pack and selected a mirror and a string of blue beads which he offered to the gigantic queen. She accepted the gifts gravely, showing neither pleasure nor surprise."

(See *The Root of Ampoi*)

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